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# LECTURES

ON

HOMILETICS AND PREACHING,

AND ON

PUBLIC PRAYER:

TOGETHER WITH

SERMONS AND LETTERS.

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BY

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ANDOVER :

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY FLAGG, GOULD AND NEWMAN.

NEW-YORK :

JONATHAN LEAVITT.

1834.

Entered, according to Act of Congress, by Flagg, Gould and Newman, in the Clerk's  
Office, of the District Court of Massachusetts, in the year of our Lord, 1834.

## PREFACE.

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IN entering on my labors as BARTLET PROFESSOR OF SACRED RHETORIC in this Seminary, I found the office to be in some respects a *new one*, in the business of theological instruction. After an examination of the many books that have been written on Rhetoric in general, and the comparatively few that have been written on *Sacred Rhetoric*, it became manifest, that I must be called to traverse a field, to a considerable extent untrodden by any predecessor. One of the first difficulties which met me, as an Instructor of our Senior Class, was the want of any single work, that I was satisfied to put into their hands, as a Text-Book on Homiletics. The best thing of the kind, as far as it went, was *Fenlon's Dialogues*; but this little work is too limited in its range of subjects, and too desultory, as to classification of the matter which it does contain, to occupy any considerable time of students so advanced in knowledge, as our Senior Class are expected to be. This deficiency is not supplied, in any adequate manner, by *Claude's Essay*;—nor by the few judicious *Lectures of Blair, on preaching*;—nor by those of *Campbell, on Pulpit Eloquence*.

This state of the case left me no option as to the course to be pursued. It was plainly necessary for me to adapt my instructions to the *immediate necessities* of my pupils, and to give them aid on those principles which they were at once to apply in practice. Hence my precepts took a systematic form, as designed to exhibit a connected view of the points which come in requisition with a theological student, just beginning to compose sermons.

Next to a warm and sanctified heart, and a sound understanding, knowledge respecting his own sacred employment is necessary to make the preacher a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. No man can *learn to preach by study merely*. He must be *taught of God*, or he will never understand the gospel.—He must *love Christ*, or he will never feel the motives of the gospel, nor exhibit its truths in demonstration of the Spirit and with power. But neither will *piety alone* render him skilful and powerful in the pulpit. Besides respectable *native* endowments, he must have others that can result only from study. The preaching of the gospel is a *science*, which has elementary principles. Other things being equal, he will best succeed in this sacred work, who best understands and applies these

principles. It will be sufficient to give one illustration of my meaning. The young preacher who has no instruction to the contrary, will be likely to draw into the plan of his sermon, all that is related to the subject in hand. If he multiplies his divisions to the number of twenty-five, he feels confident that he can go on with less mental effort, than if he has but six or eight, greater and smaller. But in this labor-saving process, he spoils his sermon, by sweeping over so many things, as to make no distinct impression of any thing.

The Homiletic Lectures comprised in this volume, cover only a part of the ground to which my customary instructions on these subjects has been extended in the Lecture Room.\*

It remains with Him, to whom I cheerfully commit the disposal of my life, and of all my powers, to determine when, if ever, the Lectures still unfinished, shall be completed. Should it be his pleasure to give me strength for such a purpose, it is my design to re-write for publication, a course of Lectures which I have prepared on *Style*; and another course on *Elocution* with special reference to the Pulpit.

The reader of these Lectures is requested to bear in mind, that the author has always regarded this species of didactic composition, as allowing very little scope to the imagination, and requiring that the diction should possess purity, simplicity, and precision as its prominent qualities. His earnest hope is, that God will accept and bless his humble instrumentality for the benefit of his younger brethren in the holy ministry.

Theological Seminary, }  
Andover, Jan. 1834. }

E. PORTER.

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\* Should it please Providence that I shall be able to finish my Lectures, which have been suspended by various and unavoidable interruptions,—the plan which remains to be executed, will embrace several more Lectures on the *general characteristics* of a good sermon;—such as, that it should be *affectionate* and *persuasive*,—should have *pungency*, *vivacity*, and *variety*;—that it should exhibit both the *law* and the *gospel* in their just relations; and should urge with power on the consciences of hearers, both *human obligation*, and *human dependence*.

My plan will further embrace a discussion of the *faults* most likely to occur in sermons, which are preached expressly on several great doctrines,—such as the *depravity*, and *inability of sinners*,—*decrees and election*,—*repentance*, *faith*, and *regeneration*.

It is my intention also, to discuss the *characteristics of a good preacher*;—such as,—the influence of decided and elevated *personal piety* on his *doctrinal sentiments*; on his *motives* as a preacher,—on his *personal enjoyments*,—his *fidelity*, and *success*.—Another class of topics will respect *intellectual qualifications*:—the value of *genius* to a preacher,—of *acquired knowledge*,—of *judgment and skill* in the adaptation of his discourses.—Another class will respect his *habits*: viz. *spiritual*,—*intellectual*,—*professional*;—his *closet*,—his *study*,—his *preparation for the pulpit*;—*originality and plagiarism*;—preaching *extempore*,—*memoriter*,—and *reading notes*. The advantages of *expository discourses*, and the best mode of conducting them, will likewise deserve consideration.

SYLLABUS  
OF THE  
LECTURES ON HOMILETICS  
AND ON  
PUBLIC PRAYER

CONTAINED IN THIS VOLUME.

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[N. B. The first Lecture is *introductory*. It has respect to the system of public and private exercises in criticism, on original sermons of the Senior Class, which exercises are carried on contemporaneously with the course of homiletic instruction.] •

LECT. I.

CRITICAL EXERCISES.

Laws of the Seminary respecting these.

1. Why such exercises are important to Theological Students.

1. The preaching of the gospel is a work, in preparing for which every attainable degree of perfection should be sought.

2. No one should think himself already so perfect as to be above improvement.

3. The requisite improvement is not to be made without one's *own* efforts.

(a) Opinion of Johnson on this point;—his example, as a critic on himself.—(b) This process of correction requires more caution and judgment in regard to a *sermon* than to an *essay*; but the danger lies more in wrong habits of writing, than in subsequent correction.

Yet 4. No man can be so perfect a critic on *himself*, as not to need some aid from the judgment of others;—for two reasons;—(a) The imperceptible influence of *habit*.—(b) Partiality to faults which are *his own*.

These principles somewhat modified by age. Other things being equal, the youngest men are generally least patient of criticism.

II. How such critical exercises should be conducted. Different characteristics of true Taste, and of that which is artificial.

In public exercises devoted to critical remarks, among Christian students, is it best formally to aim at pointing out *good qualities*, as well as *defects*?—(a) A consideration in favor of such commendatory remarks. (b) Five reasons against them, when made as part of a system. In *private* criticism they may often be proper.

Two cautions;—(a) Cultivate the habit of receiving censure or approbation from others, in a proper manner.—The habit of seeking compliments, to be avoided by the young preacher.—Officious or impertinent remarks, when well intended, how to be treated.—(b) Take care that the habit of criticism, on the sermons of others, shall not withdraw your attention from the great end of preaching; nor injure your spirit of piety.—Caution necessary in mingling such exercises with early efforts in public prayer,—and in preaching.—A literary censorship should be religiously avoided on the sabbath.

## LECT. II.

### HISTORY OF PREACHING.

What do you know of Enoch as a religious Teacher?—and what of Noah?

General form of religious instruction and worship in the patriarchal ages,—what was it?—Tabernacle.

Schools of the Prophets,—what were they?

What change took place after the Captivity, in the qualifications and duties of religious Teachers?—and for what reasons?—Reading of the Scriptures in synagogue worship;—what parts?—in what method?

Priests in Egypt and Persia;—their public rank,—privileges,—services.

State of assemblies to whom Christ and the Apostles preached.

*Names* of the preacher and of his discourse, among the Fathers.

*Laiës*,—preaching of,—what?—*Deacon*,—did this office imply authority to preach?—*Deaconesses*, their duties.

*Place* of public worship, among the early Christians.—Erection of churches in time of Constantine;—Pulpit,—its name and form;—place of Presbyters and Deacons.

*Time* of preaching;—viz. frequency of on week days; number of services on the same Lord's day;—usage of the Romish and the Greek church, in this respect.

*Posture*, of the preacher,—what?—also of the hearers,—Classification of hearers,—Why their faces to the east?

*Prayer*, before sermon, and after;—how it appears that the minister used his own language in prayer, among primitive Christians.

*Reading the Scriptures*;—by whom?—Connexion between the passage read, and the subject of the sermon;—Consequence, as to unity of sermons.

### LECT. III.

#### HISTORY OF PREACHING.

*Subject of Sermons.*—(a) In ancient assemblies, hearers distinguished into two general classes;—Adaptation of subjects to these.—(b) Most general character of subjects in the second century;—state of the church as to controversy.—(c) Influence of Platonic philosophy, in the third century, on the pulpit.—(d) From Chrysostom onward to the 15th century, state of preaching, as to subjects.

*Interpretation of the Scriptures* in sermons, among the Fathers.—(a) Influence of Origen;—to what extent his system prevailed. (b) Influence of mystical interpretation, in substituting human authority for that of the Bible.

*Reasoning in Sermons.*—Character of, among the Fathers.

*Preparation of Sermons.* (a) Extemporaneous method,—by whom introduced;—evidence that St. Augustine and Chrysostom sometimes preached in this manner;—but that general usage was in favor of written sermons. (b) In what case Augustine justified the practice of preaching other men's sermons. (c) To what extent this practice has prevailed in the English church;—its influence on the spirit of the pulpit.

*Eloquence of sermons.* (a) The two most distinguished ancient treatises on this subject. (b) Eloquent Latin Fathers;—also Greek Fathers, besides Chrysostom;—extract from the latter.

*Length of Sermons.* (a) Mode of measuring. (b) Customary length, why difficult to be determined from printed sermons of the day.

*Effect of sermons*; as to silence and order in assemblies:—applauses of hearers,—what, and how far encouraged by preachers.

## LECT. IV.

## CHOICE OF TEXTS.

From what principle this practice is derived.—Why it is no objection to this practice that there is nothing analogous to it in secular oratory.

## RULES.

1. *A Text should not be chosen as the mere motto of a sermon.* (a) General reason;—not respectful to the Bible. (b) Which should be chosen first,—the *subject* or the *text*. Campbell's reasons for preferring the former course.\*—(c) Cases in which this must be adopted.—(d) Danger to be guarded against.—(e) General character of Motto Sermons.

2. *There should be no affectation of peculiarity in the choice of a text.* Professed motive in such cases.—Examples.

3. *A text should contain a complete sense of itself.*—(a) Explanation of this rule.—(b) When it is violated, what is generally the motive;—(c) examples of its violation, by Bishop Horne.—(d) Omission of words and phrases in the middle of a text, though the sense is not destroyed; examples from Blair. (e) What advantages in a concise text.—The proper course for the preacher when his text contains more matter than he wishes to discuss.

4. *It should express a complete sense of the inspired writer.*—The taking from a compound sentence, a single clause, expressing grammatical sense, may, or may not be a violation of this rule:—Examples of both kinds.

5. *It should fairly contain or suggest the subject of discourse.* Violations,—(a) where there is a fanciful connexion of *sound* and *sense*;—examples.—(b) Where there is *no* connexion of any sort;—examples.—(b) Where the *apparent* sense is not the *true* sense; examples.—(d) *Accommodation* of a text;—improper and proper kind of;—examples.

6. *A text should have simplicity.*—(a) Should not demand a nice, philological exposition. Nor a theological discussion to show that the apparent sense is consistent with the preacher's subject.—(b) Should not promise great efforts in the preacher.

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\* Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence, p. 267.



## LECT. V.

## SUBJECTS OF SERMONS.

(a) State of the Church in any period, how to be known from the prevalent strain of preaching.—(b) This principle applied to four different periods of the church.—(c) Choice of subjects will be according to the principal end of the preacher.—(d) Circumstances which have given character to the pulpit at different times;—viz. celebrated models,—great emergencies in the Church.—(e) Circumstances which at all times will influence a judicious preacher in choosing his subjects:—capacity and cultivation of his hearers;—time and occasion;—his own talents and age;—his relation to the hearers.

*Four general classes of subjects.*

I. *Doctrinal*.—(a) Object of a doctrinal sermon.—(b) What is meant by *essential* doctrines.—(c) From what motives a man who believes these, may yet forbear to preach them.—(d) Reasons for preaching them.

II. *Ethical*.—(a) Why this term is here preferred to *practical* and *moral*;—doctrines are practical.—(b) Character of sermons commonly called moral;—and influence on hearers.—(c) What sort of subjects belong to ethical discourses.—(d) Three cautions in public treatment of these.

III. *Historical*. Including *facts* which respect an individual, a period, a community.—(a) Eulogies on the dead inexpedient,—why? Maxim “De mortuis, nil nisi bonum.”—(b) Nor may we describe all the *bad* qualities of the dead;—the true course.—(c) Two *difficulties* in preaching on historical subjects.—(d) Several *advantages*;—evidence of facts surpasses other kinds,—(first) In *familiarity* and *precision*; (secondly) In *vivacity* of *impression*.—*Examples* from the Bible of the difference between abstract teaching, and illustration of facts.

IV. *Hortatory*. The most common *fault* in this sort of discourse;—remarks on language of terror and denunciation.—Three general remarks as to choice of subjects. The preacher should, (a) Aim at *variety*—(b) Avoid a vain *love of novelty*.—(c) Never be perplexed for want of subjects.

## LECT. VI.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES.—EXORDIUM.

*Preliminary remarks*.—(a) Necessity of a sound *judgment* in a preacher;—to preserve him from a *mechanical uniformity* in his ser-

mons ;—and from disregard, on the other hand, of all settled principles, through a *studied peculiarity*—(b) Necessity of *pious feeling* ;—what character will be imparted to his sermons by the want of this ;—and by the possession of it.—(c) Principal parts of a sermon,—what. This classification only *general*, to be more or less used, according to the subject.

*Exordium.* Its chief object,—what.—Chief *obstacles* to the preacher's success, stated.—(a) *Prejudice* against his *talents, character, or opinions* ;—how to be treated. (b) *Ignorance* and *indifference* of hearers ;—the regard which these require, as to the mode of presenting a subject.

An exordium should possess, 1. *Simplicity* ;—this forbids,—(a) Pomp and studied ornament.—(b) Warm appeals to passions.—(c) Ostentation of learning.—(d) Abstruse thought and language.—(e) Abruptness.—Examples of proper and improper abruptness.

2. *Pertinence* ;—it should not be,—Foreign from the subject, or occasion.—Nor general and trite.—Influence of pertinence on variety.—Introduction from the context,—advantages of.

3. *Delicacy* ;—This should arise from,—(a) Reverence towards God, &c ;—(b) respect to hearers.—It does not require (a) *timidity* ;—(b) nor formal *apologies* for defects of the preacher ;—objection to these.—(c) It forbids an *angry, austere* manner.

4. *Judicious length* ;—(a) Practice of old divines ;—of some modern ones.—(b) The kind of matter common in long exordium.—(c) Two brief reasons why inexperienced preachers are apt to dilate the first thoughts of a sermon.

## LECT. VII.

### EXPOSITION.—PROPOSITION.

*Exposition of the Text.*—(a) When, after due examination, we suppose ourselves still not to understand a text, what course is proper.—(b) Explanatory remarks, may be useful where no *difficulty* is to be removed ;—and may fall in with the exordium.—(c) Where a regular exposition of the Text is called for, there is a difference between the office of the *critic* and of the *preacher*.

Practical principles to be observed by the latter.

1. *He may err by supposing too many difficulties in his way.*—(a) Tendency of this state of mind in a preacher.—(b) To what extent the Bible is a *plain* book ;—how the supposition, that, on essential points, it is necessarily unintelligible to plain, pious men, is inconsistent with the grand principle of Protestantism.—(c) Why reasonable to expect that it would be intelligible to such men, if we consider *by whom, for whom, and for what purpose, it was written.*—Evidence that it *has been* correctly understood by such men. Yet,

2. *He may err by taking it for granted, that the obvious is always the true sense.*—(a) Reasons why this ought not to be expected;—great diversity of matter and phraseology in the Bible;—local customs,—figures. (b) Examples of allusions to oriental customs, in which the terms do not obviously convey the true meaning, viz. from language of Moses,—and of Christ.

3. *He may err by aiming to find a new sense to his text.*—(a) Motives that may lead to this course.—(b) Random censures, in sermons, of the received translation;—why improper.—(c) Excess of criticism in the pulpit,—condemned by Campbell;—his reasons.—(d) What was the example of Christ and the Apostles in relation to this subject?—(e) How a man's critical knowledge, without any ostentation of it, may benefit his hearers.

When the sense of the text is ascertained, and exhibited, it is announced in the

*Proposition.*—(a) Difference in the signification of this term, as used in *logic*, and as used in *oratory*.—Examples of each—Either is proper in a sermon;—which most favourable to unity.—(b) Manner of announcing propositions. Two suggestions of caution.

## LECT. VIII.

## UNITY.

*Unity*;—(a) Why is it that some do, and others do not consider *divisions* as inconsistent with unity?—(b) Unity different from *sameness*.—(c) Unity with and without *variety*. Illustrations;—from a journey;—from navigation,——Applied to a dull *uniformity* in the matter and method of sermons.

Unity in a sermon requires that it be,

1. One in *subject*.—(a) *Violated*, by too many *preparatory* topics, diverting hearers from the *main point*, when there is one.—How exemplified in Claude's plan on Acts 2: 27. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell," &c. Subject, the resurrection of Christ;—introduced by a discussion of Peter's inspiration;—and the notion concerning "*limbus patrum*."—(b) Violated by introducing a *system of religion* into each sermon.

2. One in *design*.—(a) *Design* a distinct thing from *subject*. Example;—It is this which should leave on the hearers some one distinct and predominant impression.

3. One in adjustment of its parts to the principal end, and to each other.—(a) Grand principle in preaching, viz.—a sermon should produce an effect as a *whole*.—How accomplished.—Its materials should be chosen and arranged with a view to this.—(b) Illustration from works of art;—from architecture;—(c) from landscape gardening,——(d) from historic and portrait painting;—(e) from epic and

dramatic poetry.—Character of a sermon made up of a succession of good remarks, unconnected:—or of striking sentences,—or brilliant passages,—independent of a main object.

4. One in mode of Illustration.—(a) Every topic, figure, &c. should serve to fix the main subject more deeply in mind.—(b) Does unity forbid divisions?

## LECT. IX.

## DIVISIONS.

1. *Objections* to divisions.—(a) They give an air of stiffness, and take away the interest which an intelligent hearer has in discovering the method for himself.—*Ans.* To *intelligent* hearers, divisions are not useless;—and to *plain* hearers they are indispensable;—especially in a *spoken* discourse.—(b) *Obj.* Divisions are a scholastic device,——unknown in ancient oratory. *Ans.* Ancient orators, though not formal, had method. Examples from Cicero, in which his method was distinctly announced.

2. *Utility* of divisions. By these is meant, not *occult* but *obvious* divisions.—Not essential that heads be always marked *numerically*;——several ways of marking them to hearers.—Doddridge's advice and example.—Method promotes,——(a) *Perspicuity*.—(b) *Beauty*;——*Illust.*—disorder in a fine library.—(c) *Brevity*;——how promoted;—(d) *Energy*;——order strengthens impression by combining the power of separate arguments;——by relieving attention;—and promoting vivacity.—(e) *Memory*, is aided; viz. of the preacher,——and hearers,——*Illustrated* from the *philosophy of memory*;——from *facts*,——viz. plan of a city,—introduction to strangers in a room;—aid of method to memory as an *associating* principle.—Story of Joseph compared with lists of names in Chronicles.—Kind of sermons that are in fact most easily remembered by common people.—Test from the practice of note-taking,——and of repeating sermons in families.

## LECT. X.

## DIVISIONS.

3. *Kinds* of divisions.—(a) The *verbal* or *textual*;—(b) The *topical*;—The principle of each stated. Example of the kind of division required *by each*, on this text, "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge," &c. And on this, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."—(c) The *scholastic*;—principle of;—Example of division, on text—"He that believeth shall be saved;" and on this, "The just

shall live by faith."—Example of a deliberative oration on the same plan.

4. *Rules* by which divisions should be conducted.—They should be,—(a) *Necessary*.—When they are so.—(b) *Well arranged*.—Chief principles of arrangement in different cases, according to order of *cause* and *effect*;—order of *time*;—of *genus* and *species*.—In some cases, the order of heads is nearly indifferent,—in others it is essential.—Examples of both kinds.—(c) *Complete*.—what is meant.—Illustration from light and colours;—from a geographical description of a whole by its parts.—(d) *Few*;—Illustrated by a *map*.—Multiplication of divisions in the seventeenth century.—(e) *Concise in terms*.—Reason of this rule;—Example of verbose division from Welwood's sermons.—How brevity of terms is promoted by aid of grammatical *ellipsis*.—Examples of brevity in the form of heads, by such an arrangement as to suspend them all on some one connecting term, or clause.

## LECT. XI.

### ARGUMENT.

(a) Some who allow reasoning to be proper in *secular* oratory, object to it in the *pulpit*;—Why?—The objection not well grounded.—(b) Influence of such an opinion;—on the preacher,—on the hearers.—(c) *Moral evidence*, and not *demonstration*, is appropriate to the reasoning of pulpit.—Still it does not follow that a knowledge of intellectual philosophy, and of geometry, are useless to the preacher;—nor that religion does not admit of *certainty*.

### *Sources of argument.*

1. *The Bible is the chief source of argument in the pulpit*.—(a) On some subjects the *only* source.—In regard to subjects and evidence of this sort, what is the proper province of *reason*.—(b) How may we fail in giving prominence to the divine testimony.—Examples of this defect.—(c) Sermons of Edwards,—in what respects a pattern of reasoning from the Scriptures.—(d) On some subjects proofs are mixed,—partly from the Bible, partly from other sources.—Examples of this sort.

2. *Consciousness*.—Distinction between this and *conscience*.—Strength of this evidence.—To what purposes this kind of evidence is most applicable.

3. *Common sense*—(a) Why propositions of this class are called self evident.—(b) Example from Tillotson, to show how this sort of evidence may be employed in sermons.—(c) How this sort of reasoning applies to the doctrine of strict imputation of Adam's sin.—Also to the natural inability of sinners.

## LECT. XII.

## ARGUMENT.

4. *Evidence of facts*;—including experience, testimony and authority.—(a) A general law of the material and intellectual worlds stated, according to which facts become the basis of argument.—(b) To what extent this sort of evidence may be used in sermons.—(c) Cases in which *testimony*, as proof in sermons is liable to abuse.—(d) *Authority*,—its abuse,—its true weight.—(e) Practical bearing of this last topic on the evidence of what doctrines are taught in the Bible.

*Rules of Argument.*

I. *In reasoning from the Bible, its unperverted meaning must clearly support the point to be proved.*

1. In adducing proofs from the Bible, the grand principle of Protestantism must be adhered to, that our faith must conform to the Bible, and not the Bible to our faith.—(a) Violations of this principle;—(b) Their tendency;—

2. But though there be no *perversion*, the proof may be obscured, by quoting,—(a) too many texts;—(b) or too few;—(c) or by *bare quotation* of the text, where *comment* also is necessary to show its bearing.—(d) Examples on the last point.—(e) Cases in which scriptural proof is made out by comparison and induction.

II. *In reasoning, from whatever source, we should consider the influence of passion and prejudice on belief.*

—(a) This influence illustrated.—(b) Advantage of *Analytic* method, in such cases.

## LECT. XIII.

## ARGUMENT.

III. *Arguments should be simple,—that is, not complicated, nor abstract*;—(a) Grounds of this rule.—(b) Prejudices against metaphysics, often extreme.—A truth may be mysterious, while the proof that it is a truth, is plain.—(c) Use of metaphysics;—and abuse,——(d) *Rhetorical* reasoning better than *abstract*, for sermons.—Language of metaphor and imagination not inconsistent with the dignity of religion;—example of the Bible.

IV. *Arguments should not be too many.*—Disadvantages of accumulation.

V.—*Should be well arranged*—(a)—*Remarks* on the best order in introducing proofs from the Bible, when these are connected with a series of proofs from other sources.—Illustrations.—(b)—On alternative of *two* places for a topic.—(c)—On relation of *time, cause*.

and effect, &c.—(d)—On *negative* heads.—(e)—On the *antithetic* form of reasoning.—(f)—On reasoning from *Authority*.

VI, *Avoid a controversial strain of reasoning*.—(a) *Three* ways of refuting objections.—(b) When we must meet them *in form*,—*six* cautions suggested.

## LECT. XIV.

## CONCLUSION.

(a) *Recapitulation*,—in what cases useful,—Example of Cicero,—(b) *continued* or *running* application,—when allowable.

Faulty conclusions of sermons.

1. The *formal* conclusion.—What it is ; ——— exemplified in sermons of the Puritans.—Change after the restoration of Charles II.

2. The *desultory* ; ——— What leads to this. ———

3. The *dry*, ——— what it is. ———

To make a good conclusion the preacher must,—1. *Aim at practical effect*,—aim to impress the hearers as individuals.—How far this effect depends on the *design* of the preacher.

2. *Understand the principles of the human mind*.—(a) Aid of this knowledge in applying truth.—Rule illustrated.—(b) In applications, difference between *personality* and *individuality* ; ——— The former, why improper in an uninspired preacher ; —often alleged, however, when there is no fault in the preacher.—Application by the agency of conscience ; —Examples from French pulpit.

3. *Arrange the parts of a sermon so, if practicable, that they may tend to a single effect in the close*.—(a) *Convergent* method, and *divergent* ; —how the former is analogous to the current of a river.—(b) In adjusting the plan of a sermon, how far should the topics of conclusion be previously settled ? —(c) *Inferences*. —cautions respecting ; ——— advantages of.

4. *Make an appeal to the heart*.

*The pathetic*, ——— Five Remarks on ; viz.

1. Demands *simplicity* in execution.

2. Not to be confounded with *emotion* generally.

3. Not to be *protracted*. ———

4. Requires *moral painting*. ———

5. Though high powers in the pathetic are wanting to a preacher, this is no reason why he should be dull and cold.

## LECT. XV.

## STYLE OF THE PULPIT.

I. How far it may be *professional* and *peculiar* ? —(a) Religion must have its own *technical terms*. —(b) In other respects, should conform to general laws of style.

II. *Peculiarities*, amounting to faults, arise from---(a) designed imitation of *scriptural language*.---(b) Using *familiar terms abstractly or mystically*.---(c) Reading old authors, and catching their diction.---(d) Influence of *conversation-dialect*.

III. Properties of a good style for a preacher—1. *Simplicity*. This requires him,—(a) Never to use a *hard* word, when a plain one will express his meaning.---(b) Never to use a *common* word, in an *uncommon* sense.---(c) To avoid *display* of *reading*.---Metaphysical obscurity;—Classical quotations and allusions.---(d) To guard against taking it for granted that words familiar to himself, as a scholar, will be so to plain hearers.

2. *Seriousness*. This is opposed—(a) To ridicule;—(b) To levity and witticism, in any form;—(c) To affected smartness, and sparkling ornament.

3. *Earnestness*. What is requisite in the man, to give this quality to his style.

## LECT. XVI.

### DIRECTIONS IN FORMING A STYLE, GENERALLY.

1. *Remember that thought is the basis of style*.—

Writing with no object, except to form a style,——its tendency.——

2. *Study your own genius*.—Mistake of Plato, writing poetry.

3. Study the best models.—(a) In point of style, what benefit may a student for the ministry derive from reading the *Classics*?—(b) What, from reading *poets*, to one who writes only *prose*?—(c) Will one acquire the style of popular address by reading *essays*?—(d) What period of English literature furnishes the best models?—(e) Comparative value of Scotch models.—(f) In reading authors as models generally, what cautions requisite?

4. *Maintain the habit of writing*.—(a) Perseverance and resolution in this case, important in early life, as connected with subsequent usefulness.—(b) Despatch in writing,—on what things it depends;—habits of Johnson, as to despatch.—(c) Change in the characteristics of English style, since the time of Addison;—reasons of this change.—(d) Over-exactness in writing, and hurry, both to be avoided.

5. Take it for granted that your best performance is capable of subsequent amendment.—Different methods adopted by respectable men, in the act of composing, to diminish the labor of correction.—Very strong and sacred obligations rest on young ministers of the present day to cultivate skill in writing.



## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

## LECT. XVII.

## EVANGELICAL PREACHING.

I. *Sermons should be evangelical.*

1. *What is evangelical preaching?*

(a) Different kinds of phraseology to express this, used in the New Testament.—(b) Why Christianity, like every other science or system, must be taught by the exhibition of its elementary principles?—(c) Difference between a discourse of Socrates, and a Christian sermon, on the same subject, e. g. the being of a God, or the doctrine of immortality.—(d) a caution suggested.

II. *All preaching should be evangelical.*

1. Such preaching might *reasonably be expected* to answer better than any other the great ends of preaching.—(a) Brief mention of chief points in the evangelical system.—(b) Why these are adapted to give special interest to preaching.

2. *Evidence of facts* shows it to be so.—(a) Apostolic and primitive ages ;—Reformers ;—English Puritans ;—Time of Whitefield ;—(b) Testimony of Priestly,—of Orton,—Bogue and Bennet,—Andrew Fuller.—(c) Similar results of preaching on the Continent of Europe.—(d) Evangelical preaching of American Fathers.

## LECT. XVIII.

## INSTRUCTIVE PREACHING.

II. *Sermons should be instructive.*

1. *What things are requisite to make a sermon instructive?*

(1) It must have an *important subject*.

(2) Should be *perspicuous*, in *method and language*.

(3) Should be *rich in matter*. To render sermons so, the preacher should have,—(a) respectable capacity.—(b) Fixed habits of reading and thinking.—(c) Should read and think *as a preacher*,—and with systematic *classification* of acquired knowledge.—(d) In aiming to enrich sermons with matter, should avoid two mistakes,—a sweeping generality,—and an effort at perpetual novelty.

(4) Should have the form of *discussion*, rather than of the *desultory manner*.

(5) Should exhibit truth in its *connexions*.

## LECT. XIX.

## INSTRUCTIVE PREACHING.

2. *The preacher should aim to instruct his hearers.*

This appears,—(1) From the *constitution of the human mind*,—as influenced by *motives*.

(2) From the nature of the gospel,—a *sa system of truths*, on which is predicated a system of *duties*.

(3) From the best *examples* of preaching.

(4) From the best *effects* of preaching.—(a) Ignorance of the gospel in a Christian country, why criminal, and fatal to the souls of men.—(b) Revivals of religion, why not common under British preaching.—Deficiency of modern, British sermons as to doctrinal instruction.—(c) The difference in American churches, betwixt conversions under a ministry of light, and those which occur under preaching that aims at emotion without instruction.

(5) The tendency of instructive preaching to *promote the unity and strength of the church*.—(a) By producing respect and attachment of hearers to their minister.—(b) and harmony of views among themselves.—(c) Unity of faith founded on *knowledge*, gives *strength* to a church.—(d) Mournful examples of an opposite character.

## LECT. XX.

## DIRECTNESS IN PREACHING.

III. *Sermons should have directness*;—that is, the preacher should so conduct his address, as to make each hearer feel, “He preaches to me.”

1. *What constitutes directness in preaching?*—It implies such an exhibition of a subject that the hearers shall,—(a) *Understand* it;—i. e. not in an unknown tongue; nor on a subject too recondite for their comprehension.—(b) Perceive its *pertinence* and *importance to themselves*.—Illustrated in the preaching of Christ;—and of Whitefield.

II. Causes which produce *indefinite* and *indirect* preaching.

1. *Want of intellectual precision* in the preacher.—Defect in his mind as to,—(a) *Native structure*, or,—(b) *intellectual habits*.—Hence want of discrimination, and adaptation to different classes and characters, among hearers.

## LECT. XXI.

## DIRECTNESS IN PREACHING.

2. Indefinite preaching may arise from *false taste* in the preacher;—that is, want of rhetorical skill in expression. (a)—*Generality* in

terms,—and formation of sentences.—Illustrated in note, by examples from *Johnson*,—*Chalmers*,—*Baxter*.—(b) The periphrastic drapery of diction illustrated by farther examples from Chalmers and Irving.—(c) The same principle applied to *figures* in style.

3. Indefinite preaching may arise from *constitutional delicacy of temperament in the preacher*.—Illustrated in Bishop Porteus.

4.—From absolute want of piety, or a low state of piety in the preacher.—(a) How a man's manner, as to explicit declaration of the truth, will be modified by supreme regard to *himself*,—and to God.—(b) Use of evangelical terms, while no one doctrine of the gospel is preached.—(c) Indefinite language never resorted to in any serious business of this world.

## LECT. XXII.

### DIRECTNESS IN PREACHING.

5. Indefinite preaching may arise from *wrong theory in the preacher*, as to the best mode of exhibiting divine truth.—The principle assumed is, that men are predisposed to love the truth, if skilfully exhibited; and that feelings of opposition must result from some fault in the preacher.—Inconsistency of this theory with the Bible and facts.

1. The Bible represents unsanctified men as predisposed, not to love the truth, but to oppose it.

2. The theory in question has no countenance from the ministry of Christ.

3. Nor from the general evidence of facts.—Recapitulation.—Concluding reflections on the influence of indefinite preaching upon our churches;—and on the obligations of ministers to give an explicit and undisguised exhibition of the whole gospel in their sermons.

## LECTURES ON PUBLIC PRAYER.

### LECT. I.

#### HISTORY OF PUBLIC PRAYER.

(a) Number and length of prayers in the ancient synagogue worship.—(b) Two reasons why Christ found fault with Jewish prayers in his time.

1. *Order of public prayer, in the early Christian church*.—(a) Reg-

ular season for prayer, between the sermon and the communion ;— offered in *successive, distinct* prayers, adapted to the case of distinct classes.—(b) Who might be present at the communion prayers.

2. *Posture in prayer.*—(a) Standing and kneeling,—usage respecting.—(b) Face directed towards the east,—probable origin of the custom.

3. *Length of Prayers.*—How it appears that declension in the spirit of piety, has tended to formality, and undue length in prayer.— (a) In the Jewish church ;—(b) And in the christian.

4. *Praying to Christ, and in his name.*—This practice authorized in the New Testament.—Common also among primitive Christians ;—this shown,—(a) From Pliny's letter to Trajan.—(b) From doxologies used in prayer ;—specially confirmed by Basil's allusion to Arius.

5. *Praying for the dead.*—(1) When this practice was first mentioned ;—case in which Augustine adopted it. (2) Steps by which the practice was introduced ;—(a) Purpose for which the dead were first mentioned in prayer ;—(b) Connexion of this superstition with current opinions respecting *Hades* ;—also the *first resurrection* ;—(c) Influence of natural affection.

## LECT. II.

### ANCIENT LITURGIES.

(a) No authority for them in the primitive Jewish church ;—(b) None given by Christ ;—Lord's Prayer,—remarks on.—(c) When and how forms were introduced.—(d) Farther evidence, that they were not used in the primitive, christian church.—(e) English Liturgy,—how and when formed.

### EXPEDIENCY OF FORMS.—GENERAL DIRECTIONS RESPECTING PRAYER.

#### *Arguments used in favor of Forms.*

1. If they are not enjoined, they are at least allowed in the Bible, to such as think them expedient.

2. They are a necessary guard against the improprieties and irregularities of extemporary prayers.

3. The principle involved is the same as in using precomposed *psalms* or *hymns*, in devotion.—Remark on this argument.

#### *Objections offered against Forms.*

1. They are inconsistent with freedom and fervency in devotion.—Facts alleged on this point.

2. Extemporary prayer is not necessarily nor commonly extravagant in manner.

3. No set of forms can be sufficiently *various* to correspond with

the *objects* and *occasions of prayer*.—Illustration from transactions of common life;—from revivals of religion—and families.

4. There is more danger of *embarrassment* in praying by forms than without them.—Illustration from facts.

### LECT. III.

#### DIRECTIONS AND ADVICE RESPECTING THE PROPER PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC PRAYER.

I. *Remember that your amount of usefulness in the ministry, depends much on the character of your public prayers.*—The proper influence of these on success in preaching:—(a) As connected with the blessing of God;—(b) As promoting solemnity and candor in hearers;—(c) As connected with the preacher's own state of mind, and its influence on his sermons.—(d) Prayer used by Doddridge, preparatory to writing a sermon.

II. *If you would pray well in public, you must be a devout man.*—(a) Why the habit of devotional feeling is essential, in this case. (b) How this habit is to be *cultivated by a minister*;—Influence of maintaining secret prayer as a matter of *form*;—also of *irregularity* in it;—*Consistency* in spiritual habits,—why important.

III. *Let the matter of your prayers correspond to the occasion,—and to the objects for which you pray.*

There is no point, in which intelligent christians so often feel a deficiency in the public prayers of ministers, as in *want of matter*.

To guard against this deficiency,—(a) Enter with deep feeling into the circumstances of an assembly, convened in the presence of God,—for his worship, their diversity of character, obligation, prospects, necessities.—(b) Cultivate the habit of reflection on the proper subjects of prayer.—Replenish your stock of devotional thoughts from the Bible, and the writings of holy men.

IV. *Let your method have connexion, without studied formality.*

(a) Order in thought, why specially proper in addressing God.—Its influence on matter and length in prayer.—(b) How far it is best for for a young preacher to regard the usual heads of prayer.—(c) Rigid exactness of method,—Newton's objection to.—Orton's change of views, as to premeditation and method.

V. *Your language in prayer, should be adapted to the solemnity of devotion.* It should have,

1. *Simplicity.* This requires that you avoid,—(a) Low words, and colloquial familiarity.—(b) A learned phraseology.—(c) Poetical ornament.—(d) Scholastic exactness.

2. *Fervor.*—How the language of the heart, in direct confession, petition, or praise, differs from a *didactic* prayer.—How the didactic habit is sometimes acquired. *Scriptural language* in prayer;—(a)

Advantages of.—(b) Obscure passages, however, not proper;—Examples.—(c) Mutilation and misapplication improper;—Examples.

VI. *Proper attention should be given to external manner.*

1. *Countenance.*—*Face*,—proper expression of.—*Eyes*, mismanagement of.

2. *Attitude and gesture.*—Movement of the *body*, and action of *hands*,—how far called for in prayer.

3. *Voice.*—(a) *Key* that is most suitable.—(b) *Quantity*;—What extremes to be avoided.—(c) *Inflections*;—how different from those of familiar speech.—(d) *Cadence*;—bad habit respecting.

## LECT. IV.

### FAULTS IN PRAYER.

His own, why not likely to be known to a minister.

1. Improper habit as to *length* in prayer.—(a) Why no one is conscious of his own length;—why error is more common on the side of *length* than of *brevity*.—(b) Some regard should be had to usage,—why.—What may be considered as a proper, and what an excessive length in a prayer before sermon.—Remarks of several devout ministers.—(c) The most general precaution against undue length.—Prayer after sermon.

2. Too frequent recurrence of *favorite words*, &c.

Objection against such a habit as it respects,—(a) Titles and attributes of God.—(b) Set phrases, as—“We pray thee,” &c.—How these tend to produce *hesitation*.—(c) Interjection O,—proper and improper use of.

3. Injudicious use of *pauses*.—(a) Appearance of embarrassment in a preacher’s prayer;—its influence on the minds of his fellow worshippers.—(b) How this appearance is produced by an unskilful habit as to *pauses*.—and by complex sentences.—Detached sentences, without any train of thought.

4. *Irreverent familiarity* in addressing God.—(a) How this habit is probably produced.—(b) Example of the apostles on this point.

5. Language of *censure* and of *compliment* in prayer.—Example for illustration.—Impression made by such passages in prayer, on intelligent, devout Christians.

6. The practice of making direct reference to the preacher’s *own infirmities and sins*, in public prayer.—Two reasons against this, as a common thing.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS.—Brief suggestions respecting these.—(a) Shun those things which you have marked as prominent faults, in the prayers of your brethren.—(b) It is indispensable that occasional prayers be *appropriate*.—(c) Praying with the sick,—circumstances which often render this a *difficult* duty;—Family prayers.

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# LECTURES.

## LECTURE I.

### INTRODUCTORY.—CRITICAL EXERCISES.

THE Laws of this Seminary require, that each sermon of the senior students, after it has been corrected, “ shall be transcribed and re-examined, as often as the officer by whom it is examined shall deem necessary ; and that no sermon shall be publicly delivered in the Seminary, by any student, which has not been thus regularly examined and approved.

Besides the great responsibility attached to this branch of instruction, there is an intrinsic delicacy connected with it, which does not appertain, in the same measure, to any other of our public exercises. For this reason, I shall now bring together a number of considerations, which may serve to show, at once, *why such critical exercises are important, and how they may be rendered most profitable.*

1. The preaching of the gospel is a *great work*. In the magnitude of its objects, it surpasses, beyond all comparison, every other employment in which men can engage. This might be illustrated, did my limits allow the detail, by an ample exhibition of facts, showing that the highest degrees of intellectual cultivation, of civil liberty, and of social order, which are found in the most favored communities, result not so much from all other causes combined, as from the sanctifying influence produced by the faithful preaching of the gospel.

But the consideration which attaches preeminent importance to this work is, that God has appointed it as the grand instrument of *salvation* to men. The scheme of redemption is an

object to which all other objects and events, in our world, are subordinate. This is the radiant point, where all the attributes and works of God converge into a blaze of glory. In contemplating the ‘great mystery of godliness, into which angels desire to look’, we see how infinite wisdom, love, justice, and grace unite in the forgiveness of sin, and in suspending the immortal hopes of sinners on the cross of Christ. Now the principal means, which God has instituted to make *known* this scheme of mercy to a lost world, is the preaching of the gospel. This consideration invests the preacher’s work with a character of exalted and awful dignity, which very far transcends the most elevated employments of this world. Well did Paul say, and had he been an *angel*, well might he have said; “Who is sufficient for these things?” Surely then, a pious, uninspired man should aim at the highest attainable degree of perfection, in his preparation for this work.

2. No man who has any just conceptions of this work, and of his own acquisitions, will think himself already so perfect as to be above improvement.

He who has made any real progress in wisdom, will see at every step of his researches, a field opening before him, that is absolutely boundless. His sermons cannot be rich in thought, unless his materials are drawn from inexhaustible resources: and to these he cannot have access, without patient, assiduous, well directed, and long continued application. But supposing him to be a “scribe well instructed,” and furnished with ample stores of biblical and theological learning, he may be very unskillful in “bringing forth” these treasures, for the instruction of others. His style may be vulgar, or inaccurate, or unintelligible, or dry, or feeble.

In one or more of the qualifications, requisite to form an able preacher, very few, at any age, or in any circumstances, are free from considerable imperfections. To any *young* man, then, it can be no reproach, to acknowledge himself imperfect.

3. To correct our own defects, and to increase our qualifications for usefulness, is a work which requires our *own* efforts.

No process, in which one is merely passive, can transform him into an able preacher, or a useful man in any respect. Important acquisitions, of every kind, must be the result of care and labor. "There is no royal road" to knowledge in our profession, more than in others. It would indeed be unwise, at this day, for a christian student to adopt a course like that of the Athenian orator, who transcribed the history of Thucydides eight times, with his own hand, that he might learn to imitate the conciseness, strength, and fire of the historian. But the same *industry*, though it may be better applied, in this age of books, is as necessary as it was in the age of Demosthenes.

"Men," says Johnson, "have sometimes appeared, of such transcendent abilities, that their slightest and most cursory performances excel all that labor and study can enable meaner intellects to compose; as there are regions of which the spontaneous products cannot be equalled in other soils by care and culture. But it is no less dangerous for any man to place *himself* in this rank of understanding, and fancy that *he* is born to be illustrious without labor, than to omit the cares of husbandry, and expect from his ground the blossoms of Arabia." Johnson was practically acquainted with the principle of Quintilian, "that it is the work of correction to add, to retrench and to change. That it is comparatively easy to determine what parts require amplification or abridgement; but to repress the tumid, to raise the low, to prune the luxuriant, to restrain the extravagant, to condense the diffuse, is a labor of double difficulty."

It deserves to be remembered that Johnson was neither too indolent nor too fastidious to become a critic on himself. His *Rambler*, which, as it was first published, competent judges had classed among the finest specimens of English composition, he almost rewrote for subsequent editions. Chalmers, in his biographical preface to the *Rambler*, has preserved one of its original papers, as a literary curiosity. Any student who will carefully compare this with the corrected copy, and see with what punctilious inspection, this great man revised his own composition, will find himself amply repaid for his trouble.

I am aware that this critical process, when employed in the correction of a *sermon*, needs to be conducted with more caution and judgment, than in the case of an *essay*, where the heart may slumber, while the intellect is engaged in adjusting the parts of sentences. But the fervor of feeling, which is indispensable in the compositions of the preacher, is injured, not so much by subsequent correction, as by the refrigerant proceeding too often adopted, in the original discussion of a subject, in which the writer forgets his main business, to search for favorite forms of expression. I cannot too often repeat the remark, that the only adequate remedy for this difficulty, is to acquire such *habits* of correctness, that propriety of language shall be spontaneous, and cost no labor of reflection; while the *thoughts* to be communicated, should engross the attention.

But to form these habits in a young writer, it is necessary that he should be accustomed carefully to revise, after a proper interval, every production of his own pen. That this labor does not, of course, tend to destroy the spirit of a sermon, is evident from the fact, that to this very process we are indebted for the most animated, energetic, and eloquent discourses, that have ever issued from the press. And to the want of this, in a great measure, we may ascribe the superabundant supply of those, which deserve a different character.

But patience in revising our own composition, is not all that is requisite on this subject, because,

4. No man, however accurate, or however desirous of improvement, can be so perfect a critic on *himself*, as not to need at least occasional aid from the judgment of others.

The reasons of this remark, as applicable to the writer of mature and well disciplined mind, are chiefly two. One is the imperceptible influence of *habit*. It is not my purpose here, to analyze those laws of mind, on which the power of habit depends. The fact is too obvious to be proved, that this power does exist, and exert an important influence upon our whole course of thinking and acting. The constant recurrence of any object or event diminishes the interest which it excites in the

mind. On this principle, we gradually become familiar with the attitudes, features, voice, and language of one with whom we daily associate, so as not to observe any peculiarities in these respects, that would be instantly noticed by a stranger. For a still stronger reason, we become insensible to whatever is peculiar in *ourselves*. Faults that are quite obvious to others, in our use of favorite words and phrases, or in the general method of expressing our thoughts, may excite as little notice in our own minds, as the action of our limbs in walking, or of our lungs in respiration.

The other, and the more important reason, why a man cannot be a perfect critic on himself is, that he is liable to feel a *partiality* to the faults which need correction, because they are his *own*. This difficulty exists in all its force respecting a composition that is *recent*, and towards which the writer cherishes a fond regard, as possessing a sort of identity with himself. It was the tendency of both the above causes, especially the latter, to pervert a man's judgment of his own performance, that occasioned the precept of the Latin critic, "nonum in annum prematur." And with reference to the same tendency, a modern writer, of good sense, remarked; "The attachment felt to the defects of our style, at the moment of their production, is to be ranked with the sort of oblique taste manifested by idolaters; who usually most reverence those idols, which are most deformed." This, I apprehend, is peculiarly true of those faults, which spring from the heedless darings of affectation, or the sallies of a wayward fancy. Pride is always at hand to volunteer its approbation, or at least apology, for our own defects. After the assassination of Cæsar, when Brutus was about to make a speech in the Roman Senate, some of his friends urged Cicero to prepare that speech for him. Cicero replied; "No orator ever believed that another man could write better than himself."

These principles, especially the latter, which sober experience, and even piety, do not exterminate from any human bosom, may be expected to operate, with peculiar strength, when combined with the ardent temperament of youth. Accordingly, I

have always observed in circles of ministers, that, other things being equal, the *youngest* men are least patient of criticism. In any one of ingenious and intelligent mind, the desire of improvement is in proportion to his intercourse with men and books, his knowledge of himself, in a word, his attainments in real wisdom. In such a man, of course, a partial attachment to his own productions, and his own errors, always abates with the progress of years: but there is danger of its continuing, to an unhappy extent, till the best period of improvement is past. Instead of shrinking from the scrutiny of judicious criticism, therefore, he who understands his own interest, will invite it; he will *prize* it, as the invaluable, indispensable auxiliary of his own efforts. He will seek this aid *seasonably*, before his defects acquire insuperable strength by indulgence. And he will desire that such criticism should be impartial and thorough: that it should not spare real blemishes, though he himself might regard them as minor defects, or even as beauties. No one, in the forming age, ought to be indifferent to *small* faults; because the carelessness that overlooks these, at twenty, if unchecked, will grow into intolerable blundering by *forty*.\* In a *sermon*, *peculiarly*, no error of *sentiment* should be deemed too small for animadversion. Let the empiric tamper with his patient's life, by random prescriptions, and be comparatively blameless; but let not the preacher tamper with the *Bible*, and the *souls* of *men*. The error of one sentence from the pulpit, may produce mischief through a *century*, nay through *eternity*.

You perceive, gentlemen, that thus far, I have had special respect to the benefit to be derived from the criticism of your Instructors. The observations which follow will include also the advantage you may receive from the critical remarks of one another.

On this whole subject, it is a fundamental maxim, that benevolence and candor, are essential to true criticism. It has been well remarked, that "Taste is discriminating sensibility: it is sensibility disciplined by experience, which, by a kind of

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\* Hæ nugæ seria ducent. Hor. Ars. Po.

extempore judgment, is instantaneous in its decisions." In conformity with this definition, I would say that artificial taste is cold, technical, fastidious. With a microscopic eye, it sees only *blemishes*, and these chiefly of the minuter sort. Genuine taste is always associated with kindness, ingenuousness, and good will. It sees and feels *beauties*, where they exist; because it is more *disposed* to see the excellence of a performance than its defects. Its censures, though, when the case requires it, they are frank, or even severe, are not offered with asperity of manner, but with delicacy and decorum.

It is a question that deserves some consideration, to what extent, in our critical remarks, it is best to notice *good qualities*, as well as *defects*. In almost every performance, we may find something to commend; and commendation, it is said, where it can be given with truth, prepares the subject of criticism, to receive its more ungrateful lessons. Some respect certainly must be had to circumstances, in this case. Where the mind, through excess of modesty, is predisposed to a desponding estimate of its own efforts, special care must be taken not to sink it into irretrievable discouragement, by improper severity of remark. Such a mind often needs to be sustained by stimulants, and soothed by lenitives, rather than to be stung by corrosives.

But in exercises expressly devoted to critical remarks, among Christian brethren, and students in theology, the expediency of going into commendatory observations, at length, and of set purpose, is at least questionable.

In the first place, such observations should never be considered as necessary to convince one who is the subject of criticism, that we are his friends, and feel a fraternal interest in his improvement. He ought to have complete evidence of this from other sources.

In the second place, the unavoidable length of these exercises, when many engage in them, makes it impossible to point out the beauties of a good performance, without a tedious expense of time.

In the third place, the chief purpose of such exercises does

not require it. Why, for example, do you submit a sermon to the scrutiny of others? Not that you may be told how excellent it is; but how you may make it better.

In the fourth place, when it is considered as a thing of course, that praise must be administered, as a salvo to criticism, it becomes extremely difficult to preserve the line of distinction betwixt *just commendation* and *flattery*; because the fact that commendation is *customary*, and is *expected*, furnishes a temptation to bestow it, in cases when it is not deserved.

In the fifth place, the good purposes alluded to above may be accomplished with more utility, and with more delicacy by *implied* approbation, than by that which is expressed, in direct terms, especially when it is avowedly expressed as part of a system. Children and persons of uncultivated minds, will relish praise, without much scruple as to the shape in which it comes. But the man of piety, the man of maturity and refinement, will swallow with more difficulty, what he considers as his share of a necessary medicine dealt out to *all*. Indeed the man of mere *ambition*, if he is possessed of good sense, though he may be pleased with praise given in this manner, will be ashamed to have it known that he feels such gratification, and will secretly despise himself for indulging it.

If you ask what is meant by the *implied* approbation to which I just alluded, I will explain myself by an example. You present a sermon for criticism, knowing that it is to be the subject of remark, as to matter, sentiment, method, style, and spirit. You are aware that, on similar occasions, it has been customary to point out a variety of *faults* in one or more of the above particulars. Your own sermon passes the ordeal, and escapes with very slight animadversion. Do you need other testimony, that it is received with approbation? And does not this tacit approbation better accord with the delicacy of your feelings, than that which is expressed in the naked form of direct praise?

But suppose the other course is adopted, and the usage is to point out both the good and the bad qualities of your perform-



ance ; and just in proportion as the former or the latter are supposed to prevail, you are to feel encouragement or despondence ; —what is the result ? By an instantaneous process you compare both classes of remarks together ; you subtract the less amount from the greater, and find your residue of censure or of praise, with arithmetical precision. Now, so far as a man's *pride* is concerned, and pride rather than piety it must be confessed is at the bottom of this difficulty, the above process is attended with this infelicity ; when beauties and defects are both definitely marked, and marked with integrity by the critic ; the writer of necessity, in many cases, strikes the balance against himself. But when the commendation is only implied, he is at liberty to magnify its amount, till the balance will be in his own favor.

In addressing such considerations to those who are soon to be employed in the most elevated office on earth, I am almost ready to apologize for turning aside to discuss a question, which I cannot but think is of easy solution, if its decision were left to our Christian magnanimity, without the aid of other principles.

The sum of my meaning is this ; in the intercourse of private friendship, it is often safe, and often expedient, to tell a man frankly your whole heart, as to excellencies which he possesses, but which you could not properly mention in a public exercise. But even in such an exercise, a stiff and studied caution is not necessary. Sometimes you cannot point out the blemishes of a performance, without alluding to its beauties, or to important qualities of mind which the writer exhibits, and which he should be encouraged to cultivate. This involves very little of the difficulty that attends a system of commendatory remarks, which is to operate on minds of various temperament, and in circumstances of endless diversity.

I have only to subjoin two cautions, growing out of this subject.

The first is,—cultivate that manly self possession, which will

prepare you to receive either censure or approbation from others, with meekness and dignity.

There is a solid reputation, which is desirable because it rests upon substantial worth of character, and is the instrument of substantial usefulness. There is an ephemeral reputation, which a man acquires by artificial means, and maintains perhaps at a distance, but loses just in proportion as he is intimately known. This reputation is like factitious wealth. The obliquity of the means by which it is gained, and the ostentation with which it is displayed, subjects its possessor to constant apprehension of losing it. With regard to character as well as money, an honest man will be satisfied with what is justly his own. If he desires more respect, let him *deserve* more. This is Christian integrity, and Christian dignity. And this cures at once the silly vanity of seeking compliments from those around us, and the sickly sensibility, that must be soothed and dandled; that shrinks and pines at every touch, and disqualifies one to act the part of a man, among the rough elements of the world, in which it was his infelicity to be born. Dr. Witherspoon, among his paternal counsels to his pupils, says; “Do as much as you can to deserve praise, and yet avoid, as much as possible, the hearing of it. When you come into public life, not only guard against fishing for applause, and being inquisitive after what people think or say of you, but avoid knowing it, as much as you decently can. My reason for this is, that, whether you will or not, you will hear as much of the scanders of your enemies, as you will bear with patience; and as much of the flattery of your friends, as you will bear with humility.” To this sage advice I will only add that, officious and even impertinent remarks upon our performances or conduct, when offered, as they frequently are, from good motives, should never be received with a resentful or peevish spirit. On the contrary, it must commonly be our own fault, if from such remarks, we do not derive some advantage.\*

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\* Cecil says, “It is better that a traveller meet a surly, impertinent fellow to direct him in his way, than to *lose* his way. A merchant

My second caution is,—see that the habit of criticism does not withdraw your attention from the great end of preaching. There is no necessity, I must say again, that this consequence should follow from attention even to minute accuracy. And yet there is a tendency to this result, which, in minds of a certain cast, ought to be guarded against with unceasing vigilance. Gross blunders in language are inexcusable in a scholar: but it is a thousand times better to violate grammar and rhetoric, and preach the gospel clearly and powerfully, than to be an accurate, dry, uninformative, phlegmatic preacher. Be careful especially that critical exercises shall not impair your spirit of piety. Much judgment is necessary in mingling these with exercises of devotion. Remarks, for example, on another's performance in *prayer*, if extended beyond a few general things, are often more mischievous than useful. And even remarks on preaching, though peculiarly important in the early efforts of the pulpit, to prevent the formation of bad habits, unless they are made with discretion and skill, are apt to produce a mechanical preacher. As far as possible, the necessity for such remarks should be obviated by a thorough attention to preparatory exercises. These considerations are eminently practical to a congregation of students, accustomed to constant variety in the performances of the pulpit, and called to be alternately both preachers and hearers. On this ground, it ought to be a sacred rule of conscience with every man, not to carry a spirit of literary censorship into the Sabbath. If it cleaves to you in going to the house of God, shake it off, as Paul did the viper. The dignity and sanctity of the place, forbid its intrusion. If you have no other way to

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sailing in quest of gain, will take a hint from any man. A minister should consider how much more easily a weak man can read a wise man, than a wise man can read himself. Dr. Manton, no doubt, thought he had preached well, and as became him, before the Lord Mayor; but he felt himself reprov'd and instructed, when a poor man pulled him by the sleeve, and told him he had understood nothing of his sermon. Apelles was a wise man, when he altered the shoe, in his picture on the hint of the cobbler. The cobbler in his place was to be heard."

subdue this spirit, which is so hostile to the ends of religious worship, adopt the precaution of avoiding altogether, remarks on the preaching, till the Sabbath is passed; and then limit your observations to those things which cleaved to your memory at the time, without any effort of attention as a critic.\*

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\* These suggestions result from experience. For many years, I have not allowed myself, in the regular worship of God, to hear sermons as a critic; but have aimed to avoid, on the Sabbath, all conversation respecting preaching, that could promote in myself or others, a criticizing spirit. In a congregation of students, and even of Christian students, there are probably some special tendencies to the indulgence of this spirit. But still the *habit* of freely discussing the merits or defects of a sermon, so soon as we have ceased to listen to it from the pulpit, is so adapted to frustrate the proper influence of the Sabbath, that theological students especially, should guard against such a sacrifice as to spirituality of feeling.

This habit of criticising the preacher, is injustice to him. It assumes that he sets himself up to act a part for the amusement of others; and that every time he preaches, even the *first* time, he ought to be so faultless, that a critic can perceive no defect in the performance.

It is injustice to the critic himself. Why does he go to the house of God? Professedly to hear the Gospel;—to unite in religious worship; to have fellowship with angels; to get ready for heaven. When Moses came down from talking with God on the mount,—his face shone. But this critic comes from the Sanctuary, like worldly people from a tea party or the theatre. His conversation shows that his mind has been occupied by a literary or vagrant euriosity. The house of God, and the gate of heaven, has only furnished him with subjects of religious small talk. Many seem to think that it must be a good employment to talk about *sermons*; while they do this in such a way as in fact to profane the sabbath, offend God, and harden their own hearts.

## LECTURE II.

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### HISTORY OF THE PULPIT.

In discussing the large class of topics which come under the head of Homiletic Theology, frequent allusion to facts will be necessary: and to avoid repetition, it seems proper here to exhibit a brief sketch of the preacher's work, as it has been conducted in different ages. A complete account of the pulpit, belongs indeed to the department of ecclesiastical history, in which it deserves a much more prominent and ample consideration than it has hitherto received. But as I cannot devote ten or fifteen lectures to this subject, I must be content to give a mere outline of facts, imperfect as this of necessity must be.

In the early history of the world, we find no evidence that the business of public religious teaching was reduced to method. "Enoch the seventh from Adam," we are told in the epistle of Jude, "prophesied." The brief history of this patriarch as given by Moses, makes no mention of him as a prophet. But the language ascribed to him by Jude, renders it plain that he spoke under a divine commission; and that as a public instructor of his cotemporaries, he taught the unity and moral perfections of God, and the difference, as to present character, and final retribution, betwixt saints and sinners.

Peter calls Noah "a preacher of righteousness;—the eighth person who was saved in the ark," as our translators understood the place; or as others, with less reason, render it, "the eighth preacher of righteousness."\*

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\* The same Apostle says that to those who in his day were "spirits in prison," Christ preached the gospel by Noah, before the flood. And Paul, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, alludes to the warning of the approaching deluge, which Noah gave his cotemporaries, in which he acted under the spirit of prophecy.

In the patriarchal ages, the worship of God was confined chiefly to *families*, the head of each family acting as its priest. Moses, Aaron, and Joshua, in their day, often collected the people in solemn assembly, especially in the Tabernacle, and addressed them with powerful effect, in the name of the Lord.\*

At a still later period, *schools of the prophets* were established at Bethel, Naioth, and Jericho, which seem at first, to have been places of worship, where the people assembled, especially on the sabbaths and new moons, for purposes of religious devotion and instruction; and which afterwards became places of education for young men designated to the sacred office. In the reign of Asa, it is said, that Israel had long been "without the true God, and without a teaching priest." In the next reign, Jehoshaphat sent out a great number of itinerant preachers, who "taught in Judah, and had the book of the law with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people." The peculiarity of garb, the sanctity of manners, the bold and often splendid imagery, and the violent action of these ancient preachers, need not here be described, being only circumstantial appendages of their sacred work.

After the captivity, when the inspired code assumed a more regular form, exhibiting the genealogies, the system of jurisprudence, and the sacred ritual of this peculiar people; and when their language was corrupted by a barbarous mixture of foreign dialects; religious teachers were obliged to become *students*, for the purposes of exposition and interpretation; and their employment, to some extent, became, of course, a learned profession. In the eighth chapter of Nehemiah, one very interesting example of *Ezra's preaching* is recorded. About fifty thousand people were assembled, in an open street. The learned scribe,

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\* The tabernacle was a tent about fifty feet in length and seventeen in breadth. It was divided by a rich curtain into two parts, the *sanctum*, and *sanctum sanctorum*; the latter containing the Ark of the covenant &c. In this tent, which was so constructed as to be taken down and moved, the Congregation of Israel offered sacrifices, and performed other religious services.

with a large number of preachers on his right and left, stood on an elevated pulpit of wood. When he opened the book of the law, "all the people stood up," and continued standing, during the remainder of the service, which lasted from morning to mid-day. The preachers alternately "read in the book of the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading; and all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

It is foreign from my purpose here to enter into the controverted question about the origin of *synagogues*; except to say that I am satisfied with the arguments which assign *their origin* to the period after the captivity. The exercises of the Jewish, public worship, were prayers, reading the scriptures, exposition, and miscellaneous exhortation. The prayers, which at first, were few and brief, had become in the time of our Saviour, so tedious as to be censured by him for their length. The reading of the Pentateuch, in such portions as to finish the whole, every year, was a long established custom, which Antiochus Epiphanes having forbidden by a sanguinary edict, equal portions of the prophets were substituted; and after the above prohibition was removed, the "law and the prophets" continued to be read, in alternate lessons. The passage which was read, was interpreted in Chaldee, after that became the current language of the Jews; and then the ruler of the synagogue invited persons of distinction, giving the preference to strangers, to address the people.

It would be rather amusing than useful to describe the sacred rites of Pagan nations. Egypt, Carthage, and Persia, had priests, who were second in rank and wealth, only to their kings. It was doubtless on account of the veneration in which they were held, as possessing superior learning, and as understanding the mysteries of the sacred books, and of divine worship, that Joseph exempted their lands from the assessment laid upon all the other subjects of Pharaoh. Among the sacred orders of those nations, the Magi of Persia, were most distinguished; and the second Zoroaster might perhaps with propriety be called

the first Mahomet. By his intercourse with the Jews in their captivity, he became acquainted with their scriptures, by the help of which he compiled his *Zendavesta*. In this he inserted many Psalms of David,—the history of Adam and Eve, of the creation and deluge, of Moses, Abraham and the patriarchs.

The official services of the priests among the Persians, consisted in giving instructions to the people, as to their duties to the gods, and in conducting their superstitious and sanguinary rites of sacrifice. These rites were performed in the open air : and Varro thinks that performing them in temples, as was afterwards done by the Greeks and Romans, had a great tendency to corrupt religion.

The public ministry of John the Baptist, of Christ and the apostles, is so minutely described in the New Testament, as to require no distinct notice in this sketch. The grand characteristics of their preaching, as to doctrine and manner, will be considered in another place. I will only say here, that our Saviour, as did his apostles after him, and as all *missionaries* must do, in spreading a new religion, taught his hearers wherever they happened to assemble ; sometimes from the deck of a ship ; at others, from the summit of a mountain ; in a private house ; in the synagogue ; in the temple ; just as the circumstances of the time made it convenient. The sermons delivered on these occasions exhibit a combination of simplicity and majesty, of superiority to the applause, and of fervent zeal for the salvation of men, which render them the best models of public instruction.

When they who planted the primitive churches ceased from their labors, the noble simplicity which distinguished their preaching, began to decline. Many of the early Christian Fathers, however, were burning and shining lights, who, by the purity of their doctrines, the fervor of their piety, the fidelity and efficacy of their ministrations, were great blessings to the world. As the state of the pulpit during a few first centuries of the Christian church, is to be collected chiefly from sources difficult of access to most persons, it may be proper to class the remain-



der of my remarks, under distinct heads, with some enlargement on each.

I begin with the *names* by which the preacher and his office were anciently designated. One of these titles was κήρυξ, a crier; borrowed from the business of one, who, as orator of heathen gods or princes, made proclamation in public places with a loud voice. Under this allusion, Paul calls himself κήρυξ καὶ αποστολος, and Peter calls Noah δικαιοσύνης κήρυξ. This title indeed, was often applied, in early times, to the *deacon*, who called to order at the commencement of public worship. The preacher was besides often called διδάσκαλος, *tractator*, *concionator* &c.

The address which he delivered, was called by the Greeks ὁμιλία, that is, a familiar discourse, adapted to common people, from ὄμιλος, an assembly, a multitude. The Latins called it *tractatus*, *disputatio*, *locutio*, *sermo*, and *concio*, according to the subject and strain of the discourse. It is evident that *Laics*, as they were called, that is, men of distinguished attainments, who were certainly no more than *candidates* for ordination, did preach. Eusebius\* says that Origen preached in this manner at Cæsarea. And when Demetrius of Alexandria objected to this as an innovation, the bishop of Jerusalem wrote him a letter saying, "I know not how you came so evidently to misrepresent the truth." He adds that this was so far from being a new thing, that unordained brethren, who were found qualified, should preach, that it had been done in many cases, some of which he repeats. This, however, was done only in case of such as were regularly called to it, by those who were themselves, authorized preachers.

When the stated preacher was sick, it was customary for the deacons to read the homilies of the fathers. Indeed it is evident that Stephen and Philip, two of the seven deacons in the Apostolic church, were preachers; † and from several passages in Paul's epistles, ‡ as well as in the primitive fathers, it seems

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\* Lib. VI. Cap. 19.

† Acts 7, and 8:5, 26.

‡ I Tim. 3:13.

probable that the office of *deacon* was, in many cases, regarded as preparatory to the ministry; though it did not of itself imply authority to preach.

The duties of deaconesses in the early Christian church, like those of prophetesses in the Jewish, were limited to offices of piety and charity, and to the private instruction of their own sex. The public preaching of women, which was so strictly prohibited by Paul, was disallowed in all the orthodox churches of antiquity. Accordingly the council of Carthage adopted this as one of its canons; “*Mulier, quamvis docta et sancta, viros in conventu, docere non præsumat.*”

#### GENERAL ORDER OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

*Place.*—To the Jews, Christ often preached in the synagogue, and so did the apostles. Among the *early Christians* religious assemblies often convened in the streets or fields; but more commonly in the houses of private persons, especially during seasons of persecution. In process of time, places of meeting were provided, which became common property, and took the name of *churches*,\* by a figure derived from the assemblies which convened in them. What sort of buildings these were, in the time of Diocletian, Eusebius informs us, in describing the wonderful prosperity of the church, which was suddenly dashed by the strife for preeminence among its ministers. “But now,” says he, “how should any one be able to describe those multitudes, who, throughout every city, flocked to embrace the faith of Christ; and those famous assemblies in the churches? For which reason, they were no longer contented with the old edifices, but erected spacious churches from the very foundations, throughout all the cities.”† And the churches erected by Constantine, “were richly adorned with pictures and images, and bore a striking resemblance to the pagan temples, both in their outward and inward form.”

*Pulpit.*—The preacher addressed the people, in these au-

\* *Ἐκκλησία.*

† Euseb. Lib. 8. Cap. 1.—and Mosheim, 1. 383.

cient assemblies, sometimes from the episcopal seat, and sometimes, especially when baptism was to be administered, from the steps of the Altar. The common place of the preacher, however, to give him a full view of his auditors, and to denote the dignity and authority of his office, was a sort of rostrum, called *tribunal*, *suggestum*, *ambo*, and other names corresponding with the different purposes, for which it was designed. A very usual appellation of this pulpit among the fathers was "the preacher's throne." Thus Gregory Nazianzen says, "I seemed to myself, to be placed on an elevated throne; upon lower seats on each side, sat presbyters; but the deacons in white vestments, stood, spreading around them an angelic splendor." And Chrysostom calls the pulpit *θρονοῦ διδασκαλικου*. The form of these pulpits was that of a rostrum, elevated, and somewhat extended; but they seem not to have been on the same model as those of many churches of modern Italy, where the whole person of the preacher is exposed to the view of his audience.

#### TIME OF PREACHING.

In populous cities, where assemblies could easily convene for devotional purposes, it was often customary to mingle preaching *daily* with public prayers. Origen and Augustine preached in this manner; and hence the frequent allusions of the latter to sermons, which he delivered "*heri*," and "*hesterno die*." These things were differently determined, according to circumstances, in different places. But the celebration of public worship on the *first day of the week*, was, in the primitive churches, a universal custom, founded on the example and express appointment of the Apostles.

The number of services on the Lord's day was one, two, or three, according to the disposition of the preacher, or the zeal or convenience of the hearers. Basil commonly preached twice on the Christian Sabbath. Augustine in the afternoon, often alludes to his morning discourse. Chrysostom styles one of his homilies, "an exhortation to those who were ashamed to come

to sermon, after dinner." In his tenth homily to the people of Antioch, he commends them for the full assemblies which convened for public worship in the afternoon. It is probable, that he did, at least occasionally, preach a *third* time, on the same sabbath; for he certainly did sometimes preach in the *evening*; as appears from his fourth homily on Genesis, in which by an eloquent digression, he reproved his hearers for turning their eyes away from himself to the man that was lighting the lamps. The Apostolical Constitutions, speaking of the Christian Sabbath, say,—“On which day, we deliver three sermons in commemoration of him who rose again after three days.” The custom of modern, Protestant churches, throughout Christendom, except in very high latitudes, or very scattered population, requires two services on each Sabbath. The ecclesiastical canons of Scotland require three in the summer and two in the winter; though general usage dispenses with one of these, in each division of the year.

It need only be mentioned, on this particular, that, in the Romish church, at different periods, preaching, except rarely on occasion of some public festival, was entirely suspended for ages together;—as it has been in some branches of the Greek church.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES CONNECTED WITH PREACHING.

*Posture of the preacher.*—Ancient authorities are divided on the question, whether the common posture of the preacher was sitting or standing. “The Scribes and Pharisees *sat* in Moses’ seat.” Our Saviour, having read a passage from the prophet Isaiah,—“*sat down*, to teach the people.” “He *sat down* and taught the people out of the ship”—“He *sat* and taught his disciples in the mountain;”—and to his enemies he said, “I *sat* daily with you, teaching in the temple.”

It is certain that sitting to preach was the attitude adopted frequently by Augustine, and commonly by Justin, Origen, Athanasius, and Chrysostom. It was probably the prevailing

usage of ancient preachers, though often departed from by Christ, and by the early fathers.

*Posture of hearers.*—Justin Martyr, says in his second Apology, that when the sermon was finished, in the church of Rome, the people all *rose up* to pray ;—implying that they heard the sermon sitting, and united in the prayer, standing. This was the general custom in the churches of Italy at that period ; and in many churches of the east. But in the African churches, the indulgence of sitting to hear sermons, was strictly prohibited, except to the aged and infirm ; and standing was the more prevailing custom of Christian assemblies for a long period.

Eusebius says that when he preached, in the palace of Constantine the great, the *Emperor stood*, with the other auditors, during the whole discourse. And when he entreated him to sit down on his throne, which was near, he refused, saying that ease and remissness was unbecoming in hearers of the divine word ; and that standing in such a case, was only a decent respect to religion.

*Classification of hearers.*—In ancient Christian assemblies, distinct portions of the church were allotted to different classes of persons, designated by railings of wood ; so that males were separated from females, and married from the unmarried.

The faces of hearers were generally turned towards the east, either from an insensible habit of conformity to the usages of pagans, who worshipped the rising sun ; or more probably from a misconstruction of our Saviour's language, in which he was supposed to say that his coming would be from the east. "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the son of man be ;" that is sudden and unexpected. The mention of *east* is circumstantial merely ; as the same thought would have been expressed by allusion to a flash of lightning from any other quarter. The same *superstition*, for it hardly admits a better name, still determines the position of dead bodies, in the grave, as a general custom of Christendom. Heylin, in his spleen against the English Puritans, accuses them of mischievous designs, because, when re-

pairing a place of worship in London, they took down the old pulpit, and set up a new one in such a position, as to turn the People's faces to the *north*, which in all primitive churches had been turned to the east.

*Prayers.*—The regular prayers of the ancient churches were offered after the sermon was closed. Ferarius, however, informs us, that, before the preacher began his discourse, he always invoked divine aid in a short prayer, similar in kind and length, to those occasional supplications, which he offered in the current of his sermon, when any point of unusual difficulty came to be discussed. In the more set prayers at the conclusion of public worship, the people, having been silent to the close, united in the audible response,—Amen.

That each minister chose his own *language* in prayer, *without the form of a liturgy*, is clear I think, without mentioning other proof, from the fact that they generally prayed with their hands lifted up, and their eyes closed, during the first ages.

*Reading the Scriptures.*—The *reading of the scriptures*, either by the preacher, or some one in his stead, always was the first exercise of public worship. The subject of the sermon was usually taken from the passage read, and where the reader was a different person from the preacher, it often happened that a fortuitous selection of the passage at the time, required from the preacher, an extempore effort in the exposition. This passage, indeed, was commonly determined by previous arrangement.

*The Salutation, Pax vobis.*—To secure the attention of the people at the commencement of worship, the deacons commanded silence; the preachers addressed them with an affectionate salutation and benediction; “peace be with you,”—(the people answering, “and with thy spirit;”) and at the moment of commencing his sermon, he signified by his look, and the movement of his right hand, that he expected them to give audience to what he was about to deliver. This signal of his right hand, Lucan says Julius Cæsar employed, when about to address the multitude. It was common with ancient orators,

heathen and Christian. On such occasions, Peter “beckoned with his hand;”—and so did Paul, repeatedly.

*Text.*—Ancient preachers did not select a text, exactly in the modern manner. Sometimes the theme of discourse was deduced from a short clause of the lesson read, which was announced at or near the commencement of the sermon. At other times, this theme was taken from a *whole* lesson; at others, from *several* lessons. Basil, in one of his homilies, alludes to *three*, and in another to *four* distinct passages that had been read that day, from different parts of the Bible. This accounts in some measure for the fact, that the preaching of the Fathers had so much of the hortatory and discussive character, and so little unity of subject and effect.

## LECTURE III.

### HISTORY OF THE PULPIT.

*Subjects of sermons.*—Under this head, I might greatly extend my remarks : as a proper survey of the subjects discussed by preachers of different ages, would form a history of the pulpit, far more accurate and complete than any which has been given to the world.

Among the early fathers, sermons were adapted to two general classes of hearers, the *catechumens* and the *faithful*, or, (as they were sometimes called,) *impriti* and *initiati*. In addressing the latter, abstruse doctrines, and the sacred mysteries of religion were often discussed ; while the preacher, in instructing the catechumens, passed over these entirely, or touched them very lightly, dwelling on those simple truths and duties, which were adapted to their circumstances. Concerning the preachers of the second century, Mosheim says, “ The Christian system, as it was hitherto taught, preserved its native and beautiful simplicity, and was comprehended in a small number of articles. The public teachers inculcated no other doctrines than those that are contained in what is comunonly called the *Apostle's Creed*; and in the method of illustrating them, all vain subtilties, all mysterious researches beyond the reach of common capacities, were carefully avoided. This will not appear surprising to those who consider, that, at this time, there was not the least controversy about those capital doctrines of Christianity, which were afterwards so keenly debated in the church.”\*

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\* Eccl. Hist. I. 180.



In the third century, the same historian says, "The principal doctrines of Christianity were explained to the people in their native purity and simplicity. But the Christian teachers, who had applied themselves to the study of letters and philosophy, soon abandoned the frequented paths, and struck out into the devious wilds of fancy. Origen was at the head of this speculative tribe;" and though he handled this matter with modesty and caution, his disciples, breaking from the limits fixed by their master, interpreted in the most licentious manner, the divine truths of religion, according to the tenor of the Platonic philosophy.

Gregory Nazianzen, in enumerating the subjects commonly discussed in the pulpit, mentions,—"*The universal providence of God, the creation, fall, and restoration of man, the incarnation, passion, and second coming of Christ; the resurrection, judgment, and the final state of rewards and punishments; and above all, he says, the doctrine of the blessed trinity, which was the principal article of the Christian faith.*" Chrysostom, in his preaching to plain hearers, selected such subjects as these: "*the benefit of afflictions; not seeking to know all things, is supreme wisdom; the reproach of this world is glory; death is better than life; it is better to suffer, than to inflict injury.*" In his twenty-fourth homily, on the baptism of Christ, he reminds his hearers, that the scope of his preaching had been concerning "*immortality, heaven and hell, the long-suffering of God, pardon, repentance, true faith, mystery, heresy.*"

I need not trace the regular and lamentable degeneracy of the pulpit from this time, onward to the reformation. Ferrarius, though when he wrote, the day of better things had dawned, described some preachers, who, during the darker periods of the church, discussed the most frivolous questions, such as "Whether Abel was slain with a club, and of what species of wood?—from what sort of tree was Moses' rod taken?—was the gold which the Magi offered to Christ, coined, or in mass?" Hottinger says, that in a collection of sermons, composed by the theological faculty of Vienna, A. D. 1430, a regular history is given of

the *thirty pieces*, which Judas had for betraying his master. These pieces were said to be coined by Terah, father of Abraham; and having passed through a succession of hands, too ridiculous to be named, they came into possession of the Virgin Mary, as a present from the Magi, and went into the temple as an offering for her purification. At the same period, Ferrarius complains that some preachers made a great ostentation of their acquaintance with ancient languages, versions, paraphrases, and manuscripts. For a considerable period before the reformation, the prevailing topics of the pulpit were, “the authority of the mother church; the merits and intercession of departed saints; the dignity of the blessed virgin; the efficacy of relics; and above all, the terrors of *purgatory*, and the utility of *indulgences*.” Sermons consisted of quibbles, fables, and prodigies; and religion consisted of external ceremonies. And be it remembered forever, that this prostitution of the pulpit, was followed by the reprobation of heaven on a church, which for centuries has been gasping under the hand of death.

The meridian splendor of that light, which shone at the reformation, was soon obscured in different countries, by the combined influence of worldly policy, and religious controversy. When the Baxters and Howes of the English pulpit were denounced, in the days of Charles the Second, its glory departed. The rich and fervid instructions of the preceding age, were superseded by dry and speculative disquisitions, and the cardinal doctrines of the gospel, by the precepts of a cold and decent morality. And be it remembered again, that when real Christianity was thus supplanted in the pulpit, by a spurious and secular theology, the door was opened, at which entered the various forms of Arian and Socinian error, and finally of the most unqualified infidelity.

#### INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES IN SERMONS.

I have adverted to the influence of Origen in corrupting the primitive simplicity of religion. Guided, not by a sober judgment, but by a wayward fancy, he laid down the broad princi-

ple, absurd as it is bold, "that the scriptures are of little use to those who understand them as they are written." Hence he maintained that the Bible is to be interpreted as the Platonists explained the history of their gods; not according to the common acceptance of the words, but according to a *hidden sense*. This hidden sense he divided into *moral* and *mystical*; and the latter he subdivided into the *inferior* or *allegorical* sense, and the *superior* or *celestial* sense. This machinery, when put in full operation, and recommended by the genius and learning of Origen, degraded the Bible at once from its paramount authority, as the standard of faith; and made it subservient to the dreams of every visionary interpreter. Under the cover of this *mystical meaning*, little ingenuity was necessary to elicit from the scriptures, support for any opinion, however repugnant to Christianity and common sense.\*

Among the Greeks, Gregory Nazianzen, and Augustine among the Latins, became zealous supporters of scholastic theology; combining in a most incongruous union, the doctrines of the gospel, with those of the Platonic philosophy; and drawing conclusions too absurd to have been thought of by Christ or Plato. Every coincidence of phraseology, was fraught with important meaning. Augustine regarded the plagues of Egypt as

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\* From the endless examples of fanciful interpretation, furnished in the pages of Origen, I select but one. The prophet Isaiah, having rebuked the splendor and luxury of the Hebrew women, declares, that in the approaching havoc of war, such would be the slaughter of *males* that only *one* would be left to *seven* females. These latter, to escape the dread reproach of celibacy, would beg for the mere name and credit of wedlock, renouncing all its legal privileges. "And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, we will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel, only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach." Let us see how this plain and vivid description of a great public calamity, is metamorphosed by the magic of a *hidden sense*.

These seven women, Origen says, are "seven operations of the divine spirit; viz. a spirit of wisdom, of intelligence, of council, of virtue, of knowledge, of piety, and the fear of the Lord." The *man* they take hold of is Jesus Christ, that he may take away the reproach, which the world heaps upon true religion.

a most pointed testimony against the sins of the Egyptians, because the ten plagues corresponded exactly in number with the ten commandments which they had broken. No doubt the commentator forgot that these ten commandments were given long *after* the plagues; and not given to Egyptians, but Jews.

If I were to indulge a single reflection here, it would be this, that the whole superstructure of doctrinal and practical religion depends on the principles adopted in interpreting the scriptures. Origen and a few other distinguished men, were responsible for all the absurdities of transubstantiation, and all the fooleries of superstition, that deluged the church, ages after they were dead.

From the sixth to the twelfth century, public instruction consisted of arguments and authorities drawn, not from the Bible, but from the writings of the fathers. So servile was the veneration for those infallible guides, that it was deemed impious not to submit, implicitly, in every article of faith, to their decisions. In the twelfth century, Christian teachers were divided into two classes. The former were called *biblici* and *dogmatici*, or expository and didactic divines. These professed great reverence for the Bible, and gave insipid explications of what they called its "*internal juice and marrow.*" The latter were called *scholastici*, and avowedly subjected all articles of faith to the decisions of philosophy. The grand point of religion, however, through these dark ages, to the time of Luther, was, to know the decision of the sovereign Pontiff, and then to believe and act without examination.

### REASONING IN SERMONS.

Chrysostom, in his treatise *Περί Τερωσῶντες*, requires the Christian preacher to be skilful in *dialectics*. The utility of this, he shows, at some length, from the argumentative powers of Paul. The reasoning of this father, though it is sometimes perspicuous and cogent to a high degree, is rather of the *rhetorical* kind than the *logical*; in other words, it is characterized rather by the vivid illustrations of oratory than by the regular inductions of ar-

gument. But with the exception of Chrysostom and a few others, very little that deserves the name of reasoning, is to be found among the fathers. They were not accustomed to define terms and anatomize the subject, by investigating elementary principles. Their sermons, even when rich in thought, were commonly destitute of precision and skilful arrangement; and too often, what were called demonstrations, consisted of incoherent allegories and conceits, more adapted to amuse the fancy, than to convince the judgment.

#### PREPARATION OF SERMONS.

How far the practice of preaching extemporary discourses, prevailed among the fathers, cannot be determined with certainty. Origen is supposed to be the first, who introduced this method. This, however, he did not attempt, as Eusebius affirms, till he was more than sixty years of age, and had acquired, by experience, great freedom in the pulpit. That Augustine did sometimes preach without any preparation, is unquestionable; for, in one instance, he tells us that the reader, instead of reading the passage of Scripture, prescribed as the subject of the sermon, gave out another by mistake; which compelled him to change his purpose, and preach without premeditation. Ferrarius quotes Suidas, as saying that Chrysostom had a tongue flowing like the Nile, which enabled him to deliver his panegyrics on the Martyrs, extempore. The versatility of powers possessed by this great preacher, appears from innumerable instances, in which he dropped the main subject, and with the utmost pertinence and fluency of language, pursued any accidental thought suggested at the moment.

But though there were, in the primitive ages, many exceptions, it seems plainly to have been the general usage, that sermons were written. No other proof of this is necessary, if we advert to the indisputable fact that some skilful writer often composed homilies, which other preachers, and even dignitaries in the church, delivered as their own. Ferrarius alludes to discourses as still extant, which were written by Ennodius, for the use of others.

This practice, Augustine not only recognizes, but formally justifies, in behalf of those, who are destitute of *invention*, but can speak well; provided, they select well written discourses of another man, and commit them to memory, for the instruction of their hearers.

In different countries and periods, there has been considerable diversity in the custom of preparing sermons. Before the civil wars in England, preaching without notes had become common. During those commotions, when each pulpit was surrounded with spies, and each word of the preacher liable to be the ground of civil indictment, personal safety required him to *write* and *read* his sermons with care. Hence this singular, official order of Charles the second, addressed to the University of Cambridge, forbidding, absolutely, that sermons should be *read*; and requiring that they should be delivered by memory, without book, and that the name of every preacher disregarding this requisition, should be forthwith reported to his Majesty.

The fact, however, was at that time, and since Mr. Addison recommended the practice, is still more common, that the sermons of many English clergymen, whether delivered from memory or from manuscript, have to a considerable extent, been borrowed from books, or from the more private compositions of other men. The influence of this practice on the English pulpit, will require some remarks in another lecture.

There can be no doubt that sermons among the fathers, were generally precomposed, and delivered, sometimes with, but more commonly without the aid of written notes.

#### ELOQUENCE OF SERMONS.

The two most distinguished ancient treatises on this subject were that of Chrysostom,—*De Sacerdoto*, and of Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*;\* from which we learn that these luminaries of the Greek and Latin church, had exalted views of Sacred eloquence. Their sermons, too, especially those of

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\* Lib. IV.

Chrysostom, furnish many examples of an elegant, fervent, and even sublime oratory. His accurate acquaintance with the human heart, his varied learning, and vivid fancy, furnished him with inexhaustible stores of argument and illustration. Yet he did not seek to *appear* learned; and never descended from his noble simplicity, to adopt those affected beauties of style, which sometimes debased the eloquence of Augustine.

Among the Latin fathers, *Jerome* of the fourth century, might be mentioned as one of the most distinguished for learning and eloquence. During his education at Rome, he devoted himself to the art of Oratory, that he might successfully defend Christianity.—*Erasmus* pronounces him “the greatest scholar, the greatest orator, and the greatest divine, that the church had produced,” including his predecessors of the three centuries before. His writings are valuable, not only for vigor and elegance of style, but for biblical learning.

*Lactantius* of the same century, though less sound as a theologian, was eminent as a Latin writer. He was a professed *rhetorician*. The beauty and eloquence of his writings, acquired him the title of “the Christian Cicero,” and induced the Emperor *Constantine* to choose him as Teacher to his son.

Among the Greek Fathers, the homilies of *Basil*, while they are preferred, by some competent judges, to those of Chrysostom, in classical purity of style; are second only to his, in point of eloquence; and the two *Gregories* occupy the next rank. That these men possessed real eloquence, might be inferred from the effect of their preaching on the hearers. When Chrysostom was banished, the people said, with one voice, “it were better that the *sun* should cease to shine, than that his mouth should be shut;” and this, notwithstanding he often bore down on his hearers, in a torrent of bold and pointed reproof, such as is seldom heard from any modern pulpit. Take an example from his reprehension of those who were averse to reading the scriptures, but zealots for hearing sermons, and who demanded novelty and pomp in the pulpit. “Tell me,” said he, “with what pomp of words did *St. Paul* preach?—yet he con-

verted the world. What pomp did the illiterate Peter use? You say, we cannot *understand* the things that are written in the gospel. Why so? Are they spoken in Hebrew, or Latin?—are they not spoken in Greek, to you who understand Greek? But they are spoken darkly. How darkly? Are the histories obscure? There are a thousand histories in the Bible: tell me one of them. You cannot tell one. Oh! but the reading of the scriptures is a mere repetition of the same things! And are not the same things repeated at the theatre, and at the horse-race? Does not the same sun rise every morning? Do you not eat the same sort of food every day? If we ask, why do you not remember our sermons?—you answer, how should we, seeing they always change, and we hear them but once?—If we ask, Why do you not remember the scriptures? You answer, they are always the same. These are nothing but pretences for idleness.” I had selected an extract from the same father, on the advantages of eloquence in a preacher, but my limits forbid its insertion.\*

#### LENGTH OF SERMONS.

Cicero and Pliny allude to an instrument called *clepsydra*, used by Greek and Roman orators to measure time, by drops of water. Ferrarius says that Italian preachers of his day, used an hour-glass, with sands, for the same purpose; though there is no certainty that any such usage existed among the fathers. He affirms, however, upon what I think, inadequate evidence, that the customary length of their sermons, was about *one hour*.

This point cannot be determined from the expressions so common in preaching; “allotted hour,”—“hour of sermon,” &c. which may denote merely that there was a stated time of public worship. Nor can it be known, from the printed sermons of the day, for two reasons. One is, that when the same audience was addressed by several preachers, in immediate succession, as was frequently the fact, sermons would, of course, be more brief, than when the whole time was appropriated to one

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\* See works Vol. I. p. 408.



man. The other reason is, the impossibility of distinguishing homilies, preserved by the original manuscripts of preachers, from those taken down by short hand writers, called *ταχυγραφοι* by the Greeks, and *notarii* by the Latins. The custom which Chrysostom applauds, of *repeating* sermons in families, after they returned from church, introduced the practice of note-taking. These notes of hearers, were sometimes published, after a revision by the preacher, and sometimes without his consent. In this way many homilies transmitted to us, are mere scraps of those which were actually delivered. For example; Chrysostom's first sermon on Lazarus, must have occupied near sixty minutes in delivery. Whereas others, as they appear in his printed works, and the same is true, concerning those of Augustine, would have required scarcely a tenth part of this time. On the whole, it is evident that sermons, as delivered by Christ, and the Apostles, and the primitive fathers, varied in length with circumstances:—that after Origen's time, they became longer, less desultory, and more conformed to the rules of Grecian eloquence; but that, in Chrysostom's day, they must have been less than an hour in length, as this was the customary time of the whole religious service.\*

#### EFFECT OF SERMONS.

The silence and order which decency demands in a modern Christian assembly, did not prevail in the ancient church. To prevent passing in and out during sermon, different measures were adopted; such as severe church censures, placing officers at the entrance of the church, and sometimes locking the doors.

The best preachers often reproved their hearers for talking

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\* In some cases, it would seem that what is given to us as one continued sermon, must have been delivered at several times. The sermon of Erasmus, on the IV. Psalm, is as long as *five* modern sermons. Editors probably took the same liberty as that by which several discourses of President Edwards have been embodied into a continued treatise.

and jesting, in time of worship. In imitation of the pagan theatre, it became an extensive custom for hearers to express their approbation of a sermon, by tumultuous applauses, such as stamping, clapping, waving of handkerchiefs, and loud acclamations. Thus the hearers of Cyril cried out, in the midst of his sermon, *orthodox Cyril!* And Chrysostom's, in another case, exclaimed, "Thou art the *thirteenth Apostle!*" These applauses were in many cases, mere matter of form, and were uttered without any intelligent apprehension of what the preacher had delivered. Thus Augustine reprov'd his hearers, in one instance, for interrupting him with their acclamations, when he had only begun to speak, but had not expressed a single thought. But many other preachers *encouraged* these disorders, from motives of vain glory. They had their reward,—while the illustrious men whose simple aim was, to feed their hearers with the bread of life, saw their faithful ministrations blest, to the saving conversion of many souls.

The sketch which I had designed to give of the *modern pulpit*, in Great Britain, on the continent of Europe, and in the Greek church, must be omitted, except so far as it will be incorporated of course into the various topics of subsequent lectures.

## LECTURE IV.

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### CHOICE OF TEXTS.

The practice of expounding parts of the sacred Scriptures, in public worship, as I have stated in the preceding lectures, was common in the Jewish synagogue, and in the early, Christian churches. From this origin is derived the usage, which for ages, has prevailed in Christendom, of selecting from the Bible, a few words or sentences, called a *text*, from which the preacher deduces the subject of his discourse. It can be no valid objection to the propriety of this custom, in the pulpit, that nothing analogous to it is found in the modern senate or forum, nor among the great fathers of ancient eloquence. It is not the province of secular oratory, as Dr. Campbell has properly remarked, to expound any infallible code of doctrines or laws. But a sermon purports to be a perspicuous and persuasive exhibition of some truth or duty, as taught in the word of God. It is therefore, with great propriety, founded on some specific passage of this sacred book.

The principles which ought to be observed in the choice of texts, may be included, perhaps, in the following

#### RULES.

1. *A text should never be chosen as the mere MOTTO of a sermon.* This is not sufficiently respectful to the *Bible*; Our authority to preach at all, is derived from the same sacred book

which prescribes what we shall preach. It is not enough that what we speak is truth ;—it must be truth taught in the Bible ; or else the declaration of it deserves not the name of a Christian sermon. I do not say that an elaborate explication, or *any* explication is invariably necessary to show that the subject of discourse is contained in the text. When this is so obvious as to be seen by every hearer ; especially when it is obvious without recurrence to the connexion of the context, or when there is no such connexion, explanatory remarks are superfluous. This point will be resumed in another place.

There is a question which demands some attention here, as to the *order* to be observed, in choosing a subject and a text. Dr. Campbell \* lays down the broad position, that, “ the text ought to be chosen for the subject, and not the subject for the text.” His reason is, that in the opposite course, the preacher is tempted to descant upon words and phrases of a text, while the sentiment becomes only a secondary consideration.

In point of fact, doubtless every wise preacher often fixes on some prominent doctrine or duty, which he wishes to discuss, and then goes to the Bible to ascertain what it teaches on this subject, selecting some single passage as a text, that is especially pertinent to his purpose. This, I presume, is the common process of preparation, where a sermon is to be adapted to any special circumstance or occasion. The ordination of a minister, for example, requires a discourse on an appropriate subject ; and the selection of a text adapted to such a subject implies no disrespect to the Bible ; for the occasion itself, and all the instructions which it demands, are founded on the authority of this sacred book. Or, when there is some special reason for the preacher to discuss the doctrine of atonement, or of progressive sanctification, he adopts the same process in choosing a text.

But here is a danger to be guarded against, much more serious than the one mentioned by Dr. Campbell, on the other hand. Suppose you fix on your subject, and arrange your matter,

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\* Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence.

and even write your sermon, as has often been done, and then go to the Bible in search of a text. Probably, your text will either not contain your subject ; or contain it only by inference or remote analogy ; or combine with it, other subjects, which must entirely be neglected. I do not say that there can be no case in which it is admissible to arrange the plan of a sermon, and even execute it, without having determined on a text. But from the specimens of motto-preaching which have fallen under my observation, I cannot doubt that the tendency of the above process is to sink the reverence due to the Bible ; and hence it too often happens in point of fact, that, in what are called polite sermons, there is nothing but the *text*, to remind the hearers that there *is* a Bible. The text is obviously chosen from respect, rather to the usage of the pulpit, than to the authority of the divine word ; and it would better accord with the ends of the preacher, in such a case, to choose no text ; or, like him whom Melancthon heard preach in Paris, to choose one from the Ethics of Aristotle.

2. *In the choice of a text, there should be NO AFFECTATION OF PECULIARITY.*

Some preachers have endeavored to awaken the curiosity of their hearers, by an artifice of this sort, altogether unbecoming the dignity of the pulpit. They select perhaps from a passage, a *scrap*, or a *single word*, that vulgar minds may admire the sagacity which can elicit so much meaning from a text, in which they perceive *no* meaning, and in which there truly *is* none. A man of this trifling character, preached from the words,—“ Not so.”—another, from “ Jehovah Jireh,” another from “ Zaphnath-paanea ;” another from the monosyllable “ *But* ;” and another, a train of eleven discourses from the interjection “ *O*.”

At this rate, a preacher might scarcely find time, in a ministry of *twenty years*, to explain from the pulpit, as many verses from the sacred volume. If he must find ‘ mountains of meaning,’ in every word and letter of the Bible, and must devote half a score of sermons to develope that meaning, he may be accounted by himself, or by some of his hearers, a very profound man, though

in fact a plodding one. A skilful preacher, however, he cannot be, who forgets that "All scripture is profitable, for doctrine," &c. and profitable preeminently from its *variety* of instruction. If a systematic course of sermons may legitimately be drawn from one text, this can scarcely, if ever be expedient, as it respects hearers generally. But to return to affectation of peculiarity.

I have heard a sermon from a clause of the passage Isaiah 45: 11. "*Command ye me.*" The leading proposition was to this effect,—'that such is the condescension and faithfulness of God, in fulfilling his promises, that he consents to be addressed as a *servant*, in the language, not of supplication, but of *command*. It seems to me plain, that this is not at all the sense of the passage; but that it is to be read interrogatively,—"do ye command or dictate me?"—and understood as a pointed rebuke of Jehovah, to those who assumed to meddle with his prerogatives. No other investigation, than to look at the context, is necessary to settle this point. But supposing the other sense to be the true one, the air of conceit and peculiarity, in choosing this detached clause for a text, would be avoided by the preacher of sober judgment; when all becoming freedom and confidence in approaching the throne of grace, is encouraged in so many simple passages of the Bible.\*

Now I protest against all whim and eccentricity, in ransacking the Bible for some odd word or phrase, to be the basis of a discourse. I would as soon adopt at once the recommendation of

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\* Dr. Campbell mentions one of those declaimers, "who will rather take the most inconvenient path in the world, than keep the beaten road, who chose the words, *a bell and a pomegranate, and a bell and a pomegranate*,—as the ground of a discourse on this topic, that faith and holiness, in the Christian life, do ever accompany each other. It would not be easy, he adds,—"to conceive a more extravagant flight. But where, you say, is the connexion in the subject? It requires but a small share of fancy to make out a figurative connexion any where. Faith cometh by hearing: and could one desire a better reason for making the *bell* which is *sonorous*, an emblem of faith? Holiness is *fruitful* in good works:—how can it be better represented than by a pomegranate, which is a very pleasant fruit?"

Sterne, that, when a preacher is much at loss to find a text for his sermon, he shall take this; "*Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites*;" or even as soon propose this same fantastical Sterne as a pattern of Christian decorum in the pulpit. But there is a kindred fault, which, though it may not arise from affectation, shows want of good taste.

3. *A text should contain a COMPLETE SENSE OF ITSELF.*

I do not mean that it should contain *all* the sense, of which it is susceptible, when viewed in relation to the *context*. In many cases, this would be impossible. But I mean that it should, generally, consist of at least one grammatical sentence, simple or complex, containing the distinct relations of subject, attribute, and object. The propriety of this, is suggested by the primary end of preaching, the elucidation of the scriptures, as the fountain of religious instruction.

When this principle is violated, it is commonly from the desire of *brevity*. Almost innumerable examples of this sort might be mentioned; and many from preachers of respectable rank. In some cases, a mere member of a sentence, amounting to no affirmation, and expressing no complete thought, whatever, is violently disjoined from its grammatical connexion, to stand for a text. Bishop Horne's sermon, entitled; "*The beloved disciple*,"—has this text,—"*that disciple whom Jesus loved.*" The whole sentence is, "*Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved, said unto Peter, It is the Lord.*" His sermon entitled "*the Tree of life*," has this text: "*The tree of Life also in the midst of the garden.*" Each of these clauses is only a nominative case, with an adjunct.

In other instances, a few words are so selected as to express a complete sense; but the brevity at which the preacher so fondly aims, is attained by the omission of intervening words or phrases. The prelate just mentioned, in his sermon on patience, has this text, "*Follow after patience*;" which is a mutilation of Paul's injunction to Timothy, "*Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.*"

Dr. Blair in his sermon "*On the importance of order in con-*

duct," thought proper to make his text exactly pertinent to his subject, by omitting an adverb and a conjunction, in the middle, thus ; " Let all things be done — in *order*." In his sermon on " Gentleness," his text, by a similar modification, reads thus : " The wisdom that is from above, is — gentle —." In his sermon on " Candour," the text is, " Charity — thinketh no evil ;" four members being omitted between the two parts of this clause. But the most singular example of this sort in Blair, is his choice of the words,—“ Cornelius, a devout man,” as a text to his sermon on “ Devotion.” The passage is given as in Acts X. 2d verse, where, indeed, three of its four words are found, while the other word occupies a remote place, in the verse preceding. The entire passage is this ; “ There was a certain man in Cesarea, called Cornelius, a Centurion of the band, called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. This is a sketch of a devout man, in one sentence. Why should four words be culled out of this sentence, and put together, containing a nominative case, without any grammatical correlates, or any distinct sentiment ? *Brevity* is the object, but why should a preacher of good taste, why, especially, should a preacher of the Scotch church, whose stated duty it is to read portions of the Bible as a part of public worship, be so reluctant to read *one* complete sentence of this sacred book, as the basis of a long discourse. I admit that there are some special advantages in a concise text, provided it is perspicuous and appropriate. A long one is less likely to be remembered ; and when it involves distinct subjects, is more likely to withdraw the preacher from the simplicity and unity of design, which ought to prevail in sermons. But when our choice falls upon a text containing more matter than we wish to discuss, the plain course is, to select our *one* topic, after reading, and, if we please, briefly commenting on the whole, rather than to select a word or two, which suggest no subject whatever.

4. *A text should express a COMPLETE SENSE OF THE INSPIRED WRITER, from whom it is taken.*



This it *may* do, though it is but a single clause, selected from the members of a compound sentence ; as, “ Rejoice with trembling,”—“ The time is short.”—“ Awake, thou that sleepest.” Such a clause, however, by being severed from its connexion, is often wrested from its true meaning. You might take, for example, as a text, this complete and independent proposition, “ There is no God.” But you would use a liberty forbidden by all established laws of language ; you would make the Bible contradict itself, unless you also take the previous clause, “ The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” “ John the Baptist was risen from the dead,”—is a distinct proposition. But it does not express the sense of the inspired writer, and is not true without including more words : “ And King Herod heard of him, and he *said*, that John the Baptist was risen from the dead.”

A text is not to be hung upon a Sermon as an amulet ; nor like the nostrum of an empiric, is it to be taken up and applied at random. It should always express the *true* sense, and, as far as possible, the *complete* sense of the sacred writer.

5. *This should be the PARTICULAR SENSE WHICH CONSTITUTES THE SUBJECT OF DISCOURSE*: so that the text is pertinent to the subject ; in other words, the subject should be directly expressed, or fairly suggested, by the unperverted meaning of the text.

Now this rule is violated in three ways. It excludes, in the first place, all those texts, which are chosen from some fanciful connexion of *sound* with the occasion or subject in hand.

Archbishop Fenelon censures a sermon, delivered on *Ash-Wednesday*, from the words, “ I have eaten *ashes* like bread.” Here the correspondence between the text and the subject, lies not at all in the *sense*, but in the *sound of a single word*, which the preacher perceived to be related to the ceremony of the day.

The same sort of taste was discovered by the preacher, who, being called to officiate before the English judges, chose for his text, “ Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

Still less excuse is there, in the second place, for that affected

eccentricity which lights on a text by accident, without any connexion of either sound or sense, with the point to be discussed. It is said of Latimer, that in his advanced age, he had a text which served for any subject; "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." An English preacher, at the Bishop of Lincoln's visitation, in 1818, chose for his text, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men," and, after his exordium, proposed, as the subject of discourse; "To examine the doctrines of Calvin, as laid down in his Institutes."

I observe again, in the third place, that a text is not pertinent, when so disjoined from its connexion, that its apparent meaning, though it is truth, and *revealed* truth, is not the real meaning of the passage. Suppose you take, as the foundation of a sermon, the words, "Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin;" and without examining the connexion, make this your doctrine, that, *nothing is true obedience which does not result from a principle of faith*. This false sense of the passage, the authority of Augustine made the classical one for a long period. Doubtless, this sentiment is taught in the Bible, and *seems* to be taught in this text; but examining the scope of the whole passage, you perceive the Apostle's affirmation to be simply this; "Whatsoever is done without a conviction of its lawfulness, is sinful;"—a conclusion from his preceding remarks about conscientious scruples as to meats and drinks.

I have heard the text, Ps. 49: 8, "The redemption of the soul is precious," &c.—made to furnish the doctrine, that "the salvation of man is procured at great expense;"—and this, illustrated by various topics, exhibiting the worth of the soul, and the love of God. This is all true;—and it is truth often taught in the Bible; but the primary, and obvious sense of the text, as the whole connexion shows, is overlooked, by a misunderstanding of the word *soul*, which in this place means the life of the body.—Cecil says, "The *meaning* of the Bible, is the Bible."

Dr. Blair's sermon on the duties belonging to middle age, has

this text,—“When I became a man, I put away childish things.” Was it then the design of the Apostle to inculcate the duties of the middle age? Not at all. He merely said, by way of illustration, that, as the scenes of full manhood surpass the feeble comprehension of a child; so the grand concerns of the heavenly state transcend our dark conceptions in this world. In the next verse, the same sentiment is expressed by another figure; “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face.” Every one perceives how absurd, in this case, it would be to pass over the *thing illustrated*, and fix on the *illustration*, as a subject of discourse.

I am aware that the best of men have sometimes taken great freedom with the plain meaning of the Bible, under the license of what they call *accommodation*. Thus Dr. Hawker from the words; “Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward,” preached on the doctrine of progressive sanctification. And the language poetically ascribed to Sisera’s mother, waiting the return of her heathen son, “Why is his chariot so long in coming?” has often been made to express the aspirations of a dying Saint, for the perfect vision of his Saviour. How much more appropriate, in the former case, is the simple language of the New Testament: “Grow in grace,” and in the latter, “I desire to depart, and be with Christ.”

It is not enough, that the chief sentiment of a sermon is true, nor that it is important, nor that it is contained in the Bible; it must be contained in the *text*, or properly deduced from it. There is, I admit, a justifiable accommodation, if you please to give it that name, where a scriptural declaration or precept, or fact, special and limited in its original application, is made the basis of general instruction. “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel,” was an address to Ezekiel, as a minister of God, in the ancient church. But there is no violence in considering the solemn charge to that prophet, as applicable to the ministers of the christian dispensation. “I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me,”—though spoken of the Jews, would be a proper

text for a sermon, on the general subject of ingratitude. So a passage of sacred *history*, exhibiting the character or obligations of man, the perfections of God, or the principles of his government, furnishes instruction, profitable and pertinent to men of whatever age or country.

6. *The only remaining quality which I would recommend in the choice of a text, is SIMPLICITY.*

The importance of this is implied in the remarks already made : but it may be more apparent by some distinct illustrations.

The simplicity to which I refer, is violated, in the first place, by the choice of a text so obscure as to require a long, *critical commentary*, to prepare the way for the subject. It is certainly not my design to condemn such critical remarks, as wholly inexpedient in the pulpit. The judicious exposition of a paragraph or chapter, at stated times, is an invaluable method of enlightening a congregation, as to the contents of the sacred oracles : and it is to be lamented that this ancient usage, is so far fallen into desuetude, in the churches of modern christendom. But, in these exercises, the steps of a philological investigation, are by no means to be exhibited before common auditors. Much less is this proper in a *sermon*, where men should be called to contemplate an interesting subject, without having been first led through a chilling and perplexing maze of critical speculation.—On the same principle,—

Simplicity is violated, in the second place, by the choice of a text which promises *great efforts in the preacher*. This is especially the case, with such passages as present images distinguished for vivacity and sublimity. Of this sort are the following ; “ He bowed the heavens also and came down, and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and did fly, yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind.” “ I beheld a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose presence the earth and the heavens fled away.” However grand or awful your subject may be, if you would not disappoint your hearers, introduce it with a simple text. Whenever this con-

tains a figure, explain it, if necessary ; and then, as a general rule, drop it, that you may confine your attention to the thought. It will seldom be proper to follow a figure through your sermon, and never to run it down, into a thousand fanciful points of resemblance.\*

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\* The Christian Observer, Vol. 5. 493. recommends, what it calls, the good old practice of announcing a text *twice*. When a text is very long, this may be inconvenient ; when very short, unnecessary. It may be best, however, as a general rule, for the preacher to do this, in cases where he is aware that the hearers expect it. Probably it would be well to do it, in all cases, where the text is of moderate length.

## LECTURE V.

### CHOICE OF SUBJECTS.

#### GENERAL PRINCIPLES.—FOUR CLASSES OF SUBJECTS,— DOCTRINAL, ETHICAL, HISTORICAL, HORTATORY.

We proceed now to consider the choice of *subjects*.

In giving a brief survey of the pulpit, at different periods, I have already remarked, that this single article, the subjects of sermons, would furnish matter for a more complete history of preaching, than any which has been given to the world. Indeed, such is the influence of the pulpit on public sentiment, and such the reaction of public sentiment on the pulpit, that in the most important respects, the state of the church, in any given period, may be determined from the prevalent strain of preaching, during that period.

Were we to make this principle the ground of a general estimate, and divide the history of the church, since the Christian era, into four periods, we might perhaps denominate the first, *simple and evangelical*; the second, *allegorical and mystical*; the third, *controversial*; and the fourth *mixed*. The first period may perhaps be considered as extending about to the time of Origen; the second, to the Reformation; the third to the commencement of the eighteenth century, and the last, to this time. It scarcely need be remarked, that this would be correct, only as a very general classification, admitting many exceptions in each

period. The third, I denominate *controversial*, as embracing not merely the mighty struggle between the Romish and the Reformed churches, but also the intolerant, and often sanguinary contests among Protestants of different sects. During this lamentable season, while the pulpit was the theatre of acrimonious attack and recrimination, the greatest question that has ever agitated the church, namely whether the Bible is or is not the supreme standard of faith, may be considered as finally put to rest.

The fourth period, I call *mixed*, because, at different times and places, it has exhibited an endless variety in the character of sermons, from the extreme of fanatical declamation, to that of the frigid and courtly essay.

The selection of subjects, which any preacher will make for his public discourses, will correspond with his principal *end* in preaching. If this is personal emolument or fame, his sermons will be modeled, in matter and spirit, according to the prevailing taste of the time. His object may be to establish some point of technical orthodoxy; or to confute some heresy; or to elucidate some doubtful text from the resources of criticism; or to promote good morals, by enforcing some duty or reprobating some vice; or finally, to amuse his audience, by the exhibition of an elevated taste, or a splendid oratory. If the preacher's end, is to glorify God, and save his hearers, the peculiar truths and duties of the gospel will constitute the principal topics of his public discourses.

The pulpit, like all other things in which human agency is concerned, has always been more or less subject to the influence of local and temporary causes. At one time, all its powers have been directed, perhaps for half a century, according to an impulse given by a few celebrated models of preaching. At another time, an overwhelming current of public feeling and opinion has been occasioned by some great subject of duty or danger, involving the common interests of the church. For a hundred years after Luther's time, scarcely a sermon was delivered in

any Protestant pulpit, without alluding to the usurpations of the papal hierarchy.

But aside from caprice and passion, and the occasional excitement of great emergencies in the religious world, there must be circumstances in the view of every judicious preacher, affecting, to some extent, his own choice of subjects for the pulpit. He will take into view the capacity and cultivation of his hearers; their attainments in religious knowledge; their prejudices; and their intellectual and moral habits. He will have regard also to time and occasion. By this, I do not chiefly mean the periodical solemnities of religion, such as the christian sacraments, days of fasting or of thanksgiving; nor other special, public occasions, which usually prescribe their own limits to the preacher. But I refer to that general coincidence of things, which may render the discussion of a particular subject more or less seasonable at any one time or place.

The wise preacher too, will have some regard to his own talents, and taste, and age, in determining upon the topics to be discussed in his public instructions. I mention *age*, because a sermon designed to investigate some abstruse point in religion, or to arraign some vice, which calls for the reprehension of the pulpit, will be much more likely to meet a favorable reception from the hearers, if the preacher is supposed to possess that maturity of judgment, and extensive knowledge of his subject, which nothing but experience in his sacred work can give. The relation which the preacher sustains to the hearers, is connected with a distinct class of circumstances, which good sense will not fail to take into the account. That may be a fit discourse for a stated pastor, which would be very inappropriate if discussed by a stranger: and that which might seem affectation of zeal, or learning, or orthodoxy in a single sermon, from an itinerant, might be unexceptionable as connected with a series of addresses to the same audience.

There is one kind of public discourse, called **Exposition** or **Lecture**, which is distinguished rather by its form than its subject, and the importance of which claims for it, a distinct consid-



eration, in another place. The subjects of sermons, in the more appropriate sense of this word, may perhaps be included in the following general classes.

1. **DOCTRINAL.**—This head comprises that whole circle of truths, which appertain to the system of revealed religion. A sermon which discusses one or more of these truths, as its principal subject, is called a *doctrinal* sermon. Its professed object is to enlighten the understanding, confirm the faith, and obviate the mistakes of the hearers. Of course, it is in the didactic strain; as it is intended to exhibit, explain, and establish the views which the preacher entertains on the point in question. The absolute importance, which he will attach to this class of subjects, collectively, and the relative importance of each, compared with the rest, will be according to his general system of religious opinions. Some of the doctrines above alluded to, have been denominated *essential* or *fundamental*. By this, it is not meant merely, that they are taught with so much distinctness in the Bible, that to deny them, is to call in question the authority of this book, as a divine revelation; but also, that they are constituent parts of an entire system, none of which can be taken away, without the virtual renunciation of the whole. On this ground, it is maintained, that the deliberate denial of these doctrines, by any one who understands them, is inconsistent with love to the truth, and therefore inconsistent with salvation.

It is foreign from my present purpose, to examine the views of those who discard the above distinction between essential and unessential truths; and allege that error of opinion is not, in any case, either criminal or fatal. I shall only remark in passing, that to say there are no essential principles in theology, while we admit such principles in all those sciences, which are secondary and subservient to this, is absurd. To say that error in opinion is never owing to obliquity of moral temper, is to contradict all experience. And to affirm, that while the Bible is our only guide to salvation, we may yet be *saved*, though we reject the most important truths which it reveals, is to charge absurdity on its contents, and folly on its author.

Taking it for granted, then, that the Bible reveals truths, essential to be understood and believed, it is clear that the preacher who is wise and faithful, will often make these truths the topics of his public discourses. Indeed, these are the grand basis of all profitable instruction. The character of God, the character of man, the way of salvation by Christ, and the kindred doctrines involved by necessary connexion with these, are subjects which our hearers must be brought to understand, or they are taught *nothing* to any valuable purpose. The man who avoids these doctrines, in his sermons, from a perverted taste, or a false delicacy, or a servile complaisance to the prejudices of others, forgets the chief end for which the christian ministry was instituted. "The sword of the spirit is the word of God." Let the doctrines preached by Christ and the Apostles, the doctrines which constitute the glory, the efficacy, the essence of the Gospel, be generally excluded from the pulpit for one half century, and the night of paganism would again spread its gloomy shades over christendom. The *manner* in which these doctrines are to be preached, will claim our attention hereafter. I have only to add here, that this class, including the primary and the subordinate truths of revelation, afford the preacher a rich *variety* of subjects for discussion in the pulpit.

2. *The next class of subjects to be noticed, may be called ETHICAL.*—I prefer this term to the more common ones, *practical* and *moral*, not on account of any primary difference in the sense of the terms, but because these latter are wont to be associated with views of christian duty, very indefinite, and often erroneous. In respect to the motives, the consolations, and indeed all the essential characteristics of a truly religious man, the doctrines of the Bible are eminently *practical*. To give one example of my meaning. Any minister of experience in his work, knows that the directest way to administer consolation to a pious husband, mourning for the death of his wife, would be to dwell on the holy perfection of God, and of his providential government.\* No system of morals, indeed, thas is not founded

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\* On the practical influence of Christian doctrines, see Erskine's

on these, will receive any countenance from the ministrations of a public teacher, who understands and loves the Gospel. He cannot for a moment sanction the spurious morality, which attaches moral qualities to actions, independent of the temper and motives of the agent. It may be said, and said truly perhaps, that no respectable man does avowedly plead for a principle, so repugnant to sound philosophy and to common sense. But unquestionably, thousands of sermons are every year delivered in Christendom, which contain no more recognition of this obvious principle, than if it were self-evident, that the heart has no connexion with the conduct, but is altogether exempt from the claims of the divine law. Such sermons pervert and prostitute the first principles of Christian morality. They set up custom, convenience, or expediency, as the standard of human duty; and substitute mere external conformity to divine commands, for that love, which is the essence of all acceptable obedience. Though such morality may assume the name of religion, it is a religion which the Bible disowns. It is completely at variance with the gospel, and with the law, which it is the great design of the gospel to honor and fulfil. Accordingly it deserves to be remembered, that the system which is thus termed morality, invariably fails of itself to make men *moral*. When this constitutes the prevalent strain of preaching, its influence falls far below the proper effect of christian instruction.\*

With these things in view, I need only add, that the class of subjects denominated ethical, which the preacher is called to discuss in sermons, includes all those external duties which man is required to perform, resulting from his relations to other beings, especially to his fellow men. It includes prayer, observance of Christian institutions, fidelity, charity, &c. to our neighbor. Whenever these subjects are to be brought into the pulpit, three

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Discourses, 1798, p. 54. and Bridges on the Christian Ministry, Vol. 2. p. 35 &c.

\* The best illustration of this topic that I have ever seen, is contained in Dr. Chalmers' address to the people of Kilmany.

things at least ought to be remembered. One is, that the precepts of Christianity require the same conduct, as those of the moral law, extended, indeed, to greater particularity in detail, and enforced by stricter requisitions as to moral temper, and greater elevation of motive : while both possess, in all these respects, a vast superiority to every human system of morals. Another thing is, that good works, however unexceptionable in character, can never be the ground of justification before God, so as to supersede the dependence of a sinner on the atonement and grace of Christ. The last thing is, that while we cannot admit morality, without piety, to be acceptable obedience, nor with piety, to be meritorious ; we should insist on the indispensable necessity of a good life ; as commanded by God ; as essential to the relations subsisting among moral beings ; and as the only proper fruit and evidence of a holy temper.

3. *Another class of subjects for sermons, is the HISTORICAL.*—This includes a statement of facts, which is limited to the character of an individual ; or which relates to some particular period, or to some community of men. In the former case, it is the object of the preacher to exhibit the traits of some distinguished character, good or bad, as the basis of practical instruction. Such descriptions, so far as the pulpit is concerned, have commonly been restricted to the character of persons deceased, and to their excellencies rather than their defects ; according to the long received maxim ; “ *De mortuis, nil nisi bonum.*” To this maxim, in its full extent, I can by no means accede. If it is understood to imply merely that death imposes an awe on the licentiousness of the tongue, because it extinguishes those little antipathies, which often affect our estimate of *living* persons ; no enlightened mind will question its correctness. But if the meaning is, that when men die, their errors and faults cease to be the occasion of warning or instruction to the *living* ; and that in all such cases, where we cannot truly speak good, we must of course speak *nothing* or *falsehood* ; the principle has no sanction from reason, none from the Bible, and it will

have none from the scrutiny and the retributions of the final judgment.

Shall the preacher then revolt the sensibilities of his hearers, by exactly portraying the imperfections of departed friends?—I answer, no. But he is not to escape this difficulty by indiscriminate panegyric. Did we *know* the man whose character is represented as perfect? Of course we know that it is overdrawn, for he was *not* perfect. Was he a stranger to us? Still we know, from revelation and from analogy, that he was not perfect. In general, therefore, unmingled eulogy of the dead, however it may gratify the partial sympathies of friendship, or promote the interest of the preacher, is beneath the integrity and dignity which belongs to his sacred office. His true course then, is to avoid describing the character of persons recently deceased, except in a few cases of conspicuous and acknowledged excellence. And while these are drawn in colors not too bright to present the likeness of any human being, the qualities of an eminently good and useful man, exhibited in one consistent view, furnishes to others, very powerful motives to imitate an example so attractive. So much it seemed proper to say on a subject which occasionally claims the consideration of every preacher: and more, I presume, need not be said, since modern usage excludes from the pulpit, the extravagant panegyrics of former days. At this period, even in Catholic countries, it would hardly be admitted as an apology for such servile flattery, as that exhibited by Bossuet, in some of his *Funeral Orations*, that it was addressed to the ears of royalty.

But under the head of historical subjects, the Bible affords an ample range, free from all the above difficulties. From individual characters there delineated, and from facts exhibiting the providence of God, and the agency of man, in the history of communities, the preacher may derive the most interesting topics for sermons. As these have been very much overlooked, in preparations for the pulpit, it may be useful to inquire whether they are attended with any peculiar *inconvenience* or *advantage*. There are certainly some *inconveniences*.

The common method adopted in describing a character, an event, or a series of events, is to follow a chronological order, and relate occurrences as they stand connected in time. Here, the first difficulty arises from a tendency either to undue brevity or prolixity in the narrative. It is peculiarly the province of good taste, to fix on the medium between a naked outline, and that particularity of detail, which disgusts by excessive minuteness.

Another and greater difficulty arises from the miscellaneous train of remarks, commonly suggested by a historical subject. In some cases, I know, a single point may be selected for discussion; but a sermon founded on facts, almost of course, takes into view various reflections, resulting from the narrative. Though this sacrifice of unity is not consistent with the highest effect of a sermon, it is, in my opinion, fully justified on proper occasions, by the advantages with which it is attended. What then are these *advantages*?

The first is, the *familiarity*, and *precision* which attends the evidence of facts. Men instantly *understand* reasoning of this sort. It corresponds with their customary modes of conception. When an argument depends on the investigation of criticism, or the deductions of logic, few possess that intellectual discipline, and patience of thought, which are necessary clearly to perceive its force. But a plain, historical statement, if the facts are unquestionable, is a kind of argument, which it is as easy to comprehend, as it is to breathe or to look. It is on this account, probably, that the instructions of the Bible are so much thrown into the form of narrative. And it is especially to our purpose here, to remark, that the public discourses of our Lord, more particularly his parables, which are only a peculiar species of narrative, are adapted to this common principle of the human mind. Hence this kind of evidence more readily commands assent in common minds, than any other. In its power it is complex, though without obscurity. With a felicity peculiar to itself, it unites the evidence of sense, of experience, and of testimony; while the combined influence of these is strengthened

by the simple light in which this evidence is presented to the understanding.

Of course, a *second* advantage is, the *vivacity of impression*, with which this species of discourse is attended. Every preacher knows how difficult it is to keep up the interest of a common assembly in the discussion of an *abstract* subject. Their feelings demand something of that variety in illustration, which attends the concerns of real life. Hence it is, that a metaphor or comparison, founded on some familiar object of sense, is so striking in its effect. Hence, too, a statement of *facts*, delineating human character, and tracing human passions and principles in their various operations, invariably commands the attention of common hearers, especially of the young. It accords with the manner in which they are accustomed to receive instruction from the book of *Providence*, and of *creation* around them. We readily feel the difference between the description of a man's person, and the sight of his picture; or between the sight of his picture, and that of his living face. Analogous to this, as to vivacity of impression, is the difference between instruction of *doctrine* or *precept*, and the instruction of *facts*. When the baseness of envy, or the obligation of filial affection, and religious integrity, is set before us, in the form of didactic representation, we readily assent to its correctness. But how different is the thrilling interest with which we contemplate the same things in the simple story of Joseph? We are convinced by the logical discussion which proves the vanity of earthly distinctions, and the certainty of an eternal retribution. But we are impressed, arrested, agitated with awful emotion, when we view these truths in the parable of the rich man and the beggar. In what way do we form the most striking apprehension of faith, repentance, devotion? Not by viewing these in the light of precept or reasoning; but as they are seen in the example of Abraham offering up Isaac; of Peter, weeping bitterly for the denial of his Lord; of Daniel, braving the terrors of the lion's den. And the excellence of humility we perceive not so strongly, from an abstract dissertation on the greatness of God, or the meanness and

guilt of man ; as when we see the publican smiting on his breast ; or the Saviour, in the majesty of condescension, rising, and girding himself, and washing the feet of his disciples.

In these remarks, I cannot be understood to recommend that historical subjects should supersede others in the pulpit. My meaning is, that this class of subjects has some peculiar advantages, which have not been duly considered by public teachers.

4. *There is one more class of subjects which ought to be mentioned, namely, the HORTATORY.*

Upon this head, there is no occasion that I should enlarge, though the topics which it includes, are endless in variety and extent of interest. Among these are to be reckoned all the points on which the preacher considers his hearers both to *know* and *acknowledge* the truth, in speculation ; while they neither feel nor obey it.

The defect which is far more common than any other in the hortatory discourse, consists in a reliance on the *subject itself*, to produce impression, while it is exhibited only in the feeble dress of commonplace illustration. Upon a subject which demands deep emotion, the preacher perhaps displays an artificial animation ; and *declaims* merely, where he ought to speak “in demonstration of the spirit and with power.” *Conviction* is the basis of persuasion ; and to address men with epithets of *terror*, to assume the attitude and aspect of *denunciation*, in pointing the thunderbolts of heaven, when no light has been presented to the understanding, though a very common defect of comminatory sermons, is one of the most unprofitable efforts in which a minister of Christ can employ his powers. To preach the *truth*, on some subjects, and to some descriptions of men, is unavoidably to preach *terror*. But if we follow the example of Christ and the Apostles, the terror will consist in the *thought*, rather than the *language*. They never, indeed, avoided the use of figures the most awful, nor of such words as *damnation*, *hell*, &c. when *necessary* to express the sentiment they wished to utter ; nor did they ever employ these forms of expression un-



necessarily. On the contrary, without using them at all, they sometimes preached the gospel in the most alarming manner. It deserves to be remembered that such was the fact with Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost, the most pungent and powerful one that ever was delivered. The sermon of President Edwards, entitled, "Sinners in the hands of an angry God," was one of the most awful exhibitions of truth, as to both sentiment and language, that has been made in the modern pulpit. Its effect on the audience, as to deep and solemn impression, was perhaps greater than that of any other sermon that can be named within a century past. But terrific phraseology was used no farther than was necessary to express the thoughts. So Whitefield often employed words and figures full of terror; but he did this with tenderness, and often with tears;—instead of that unfeeling severity of denunciation, so often witnessed.

When we choose a subject from this class, we ought to do it with the full conviction, that our success, so far as it depends on ourselves, depends almost entirely on that sort of ethereal simplicity, sincerity, affection, and fervor, in the spirit and execution, which commend the truth to the hearts of the hearers.

*Three remarks will close this Lecture.*

1. In selecting subjects for sermons, the Christian teacher should *aim at variety*. To preach month after month, on a single subject, or a contracted circle of subjects, is to depart from the grand model of instruction as contained in the book of Revelation, and the book of Providence. *Diversity* in the course of events, in the condition, taste and attainments of different hearers, and of the same hearers in different circumstances, demands a correspondent *diversity*, in the instructions of the pulpit. Let the preacher then sieze upon *occasions*, as they rise. Let him follow Providence; and always turn to good account, every interesting occurrence, among his flock. Yet,

2. The preacher should never, to gratify *a vain love of novelty and amusement*, sink his ministrations to the rank of a dramatic exhibition. He should never forget that he is an ambas-

sador of Christ; and that his main business is, to turn the sinner from darkness to light; and to build up the believer in his most holy faith. The exact limits within which he shall keep, cannot indeed be prescribed. But when he descends, as some preachers of our time have done, to discourse upon "vaccination"—"upon the popular dread of apparitions,"—"the beauties of a New England autumn, and the charms of its Indian summer;" it is no great stretch of preciseness to say, that he occupies ground, which better accords with the objects of a novel or gazette, than with those of a Christian sermon. The incidental allusion to such topics by way of illustration, is by no means improper; but they cannot be made the chief subjects of discourse, without wresting the pulpit from "the sober use of its legitimate, peculiar powers."—"Insist," said the venerable Archbishop Usher, in his directions to young ministers,—"*insist most on those points, that tend to produce sound belief, sincere love to God, repentance for sin, and a life of holiness.*"

3. That preacher who *is perplexed through want of subjects for sermons*, should suspect that something is wrong in himself; at least, that he is very imperfectly qualified for his office. His religion furnishes topics, inexhaustible in variety, and beyond all comparison, superior in richness, elevation, and sublimity, to those which any other public speaker is called to discuss. In the character of God, he contemplates all that is profound in wisdom, awful in holiness, and attractive in mercy. In the character of man, he sees a combination of dignity and misery; the dignity of an immortal soul, polluted and degraded by sin. He sees majesty and meekness, glory and ignominy, strangely united in the character and sufferings of Christ. He sees in the gospel, provided for fallen man, at infinite expense, a rescue from his ruin, "a remedy for his maladies, and a rule for his guidance." He sees heaven with all its blessedness inviting to a life of piety, and hell with all its miseries awaiting the ungodly. Is it possible that with a field before him, absolutely boundless, a man can want subjects for sermons? In selecting among these, one

that shall be most appropriate in given circumstances, I allow he may hesitate. But, with the profusion of interesting matter, displayed in every page of the Bible, if he is perplexed to find any topic of discourse, he has mistaken his business. Let him go to the farm or to the shop. The fact that he wants a *subject*, is demonstration that he wants either the *understanding* or the *heart* of a minister.

## LECTURE VI.

STRUCTURE OF SERMONS.—PRELIMINARY REMARKS,—NECESSITY OF SOUND JUDGMENT, AND A PIOUS SPIRIT IN A PREACHER.—EXORDIUM.

Our attention will be directed, through several following lectures, to THE STRUCTURE OF SERMONS. In entering upon this large class of topics, some preliminary suggestions seem to be required.

The composition of a sermon calls into exercise both the *intellect* and the *heart*. As a work of intellect, the preacher's success in selecting and arranging his materials, depends in no small measure on the soundness of his judgment. Through an infelicity of taste or habit, some men treat all sorts of subjects in one precise method. They have just so many principal heads, just so many subdivisions, and so many inferences in each discourse, following in exact succession, like the strokes of the clock, which mark the hours of the day. The hearers easily anticipate the particulars of this unvarying round. Now this rigid uniformity is not applicable to any important business, depending on the agency of mind. What should we think of a general, who should plan a battle or a siege according to books, without regarding the character of his troops, the circumstances of his position, or the strength of his enemy? He might spend the time

of a campaign in drawing lines of circumvallation or contravallation, and with all his mathematical exactness, he might prove a harmless enemy to those, who would have trembled at the prompt use of bayonets and heavy artillery. Should the lawyer treat all causes of his clients, or the physician all diseases of his patients, in one technical method, without regarding the endless variety of circumstances, what should we say of their skill in their several professions? Certainly a mode of proceeding, which is absurd in all other cases, is not less absurd in the pulpit.

But the reasonable disgust which we feel at a mechanical uniformity, should not push us into the opposite extreme. Oratory, like other arts, has settled principles. The solicitor when he speaks, has some *end* in view; and applies his powers to attain it, not at random, but according to some plan, adapted to his purpose. He states facts, adduces testimony, cites authority, reasons, obviates prejudices, rouses emotion. To gain his cause, he combines more or fewer sources of argument, and directs his efforts to a given point of attack or defence, as a versatile invention, and a skilful judgment may dictate. He adopts a particular course, not by accident, but because his knowledge of men, and of his profession, induces him to prefer this, as most likely to be successful.

The wise *preacher* too, will proceed according to the *subject* and *design* of his discourse; and will not be so afraid of rules, as to establish the rule, that a sermon should have *no* subject nor design. Without using judgment, every rule indeed, will be unavailing, even to teach him the meaning of his text. Does it therefore follow that the system of sacred interpretation can give him no aid in understanding the Bible?—or that he is to ascertain the sense of a single text only by chance, without any principles to guide him? No more does it follow, because mere rules cannot enable him to compose a good sermon, that therefore he can never hope to make such a sermon, except by chance. The thought, the method, and the expression, all demand pains and skill. Writing is a fine art, and has elementa-

ry principles. Accident might as well produce the Messiah of Handel, as the *Paradise Lost*; might as well guide the chisel of Praxiteles, or the pencil of Raffaele, as the pen of Addison.

I am aware that a random effort in the pulpit, is sometimes successful. But when it is so, if it was occasioned by affected peculiarity, or careless neglect of regular preparation, it requires apology rather than commendation.

It is to be expected that the tendency to imitation, and the insensible influence of habit, in a Seminary like this, will produce, to some extent, uniformity in public exercises. But in the composition of sermons, there is, if I mistake not, a counter-acting tendency, of great strength. I refer not to a useful and pleasant variety, resulting from difference of taste and temperament, and giving to each man something that is characteristic, in his own manner of thinking and writing. I refer to that studied aim at *peculiarity*, which is often connected with genius, but commonly with genius of secondary rank, and that under the influence of pride. The writer of a sermon with such feelings, perhaps, sits down to his work in his study, with deliberate calculation to avoid, at all events, the *customary* method of treating a subject. But in gratifying a fastidious humour, and in avoiding the fault of a rigid exactness, he may fall into another of ten times greater magnitude, the affectation of originality. Pride chooses to err, rather than not to be singular: but the wise man will not grope his way through thickets, merely because the high road is so common. The preacher, more than any other man, needs a *sober judgment*.

This leads to another remark, viz. on the necessity of *pious feeling*. The preacher's success in composing a sermon, depends preeminently on the state of *heart*, with which he comes to the work. Suppose he engages in it with the same frigid calculation, with which a mechanic sits down to the construction of a clock. His object is to amuse his hearers: to make an advantageous display of his own genius, or learning, or eloquence. With this view, he chooses his subject and his method; adopts some novel interpretation of his text, becoming a

man of erudition ; calls to his aid all the resources of profound theological research ; adjusts all his topics of argument, and of address to the passions, according to the best canons of taste ;—and when the sermon is finished, what is it ?—a body with fair proportions, elegant, splendid, perhaps, in its decorations, but a body without a *soul*. One *sentence* of simple, Puritan eloquence, is worth a *thousand* such sermons.

But let the preacher commence his preparation for the pulpit with the heart of a devout Christian ; a heart that regards as the great end of preaching, the glory of God and the salvation of man ; a heart that feels the worth of souls, glows with holy affection to the Redeemer, and anticipates with trembling hope, the day when he shall come to be glorified in them that believe ; and this spirit will diffuse a savour of godliness through the sermon, that will warm, and impress, and penetrate his hearers. Luther's maxim, " Bene orasse est bene studuisse," should be graven on the memory of every preacher. None but God, can effectually teach *us*, how to teach *others*. A heart devoted to him in the study, will stamp its own character of sanctity and energy on every preparation for the pulpit. And let it never be forgotten by the students of this Seminary, that no fund of knowledge, no rhetorical skill in the selection of matter, or in the arrangement or embellishment of a discourse, can make it in any measure what a Christian sermon should be, if it wants that vital impulse, which nothing can impart but a spirit of fervent piety.\*

With these general remarks in view, we may proceed to consider that arrangement of parts, which is most customary in a regular sermon. To every such sermon, some of these parts will of course belong. You will readily perceive that it is not my object to designate the cases in which more or fewer of them may be dispensed with ; but to lay down some principles, in respect to each, that may assist the young preacher, in his preparations for the pulpit ; taking it for granted, that he will en-

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\* See Erskine's Discourses on Ministry, Ser. I.

deavour to make such an arrangement of parts, in any given case, as is best adapted to the subject and design of his discourse. The principal parts of a sermon which now demand our consideration are these five, *exordium, exposition and proposition, division, discussion or argument, and conclusion*. The observations which I shall make on these particulars, will necessarily bring into view some of the great principles of preaching; and instead of exhausting the subject, will only prepare the way for examining, more fully, the general characteristics of sermons.

#### EXORDIUM.

The only valuable purpose for which any public speaker can address an assembly, is to make them understand, and believe, and feel, the sentiments which he utters. The chief object of an introduction then is, to secure that attention which is most favourable to the attainment of this purpose; and the obstacles which prevent this favourable attention, are commonly found in the *prejudice*, the *ignorance*, or the *indifference* of the hearers. They may have a low estimate of the talents or the moral character of the preacher. In such a case, however, the remedy lies not in any effect which he can hope to produce by a few prefatory sentences, at the opening of a sermon; but in his becoming better *known* to his hearers, if he *deserves* their respect, or becoming a *better man*, if he does not. If the prejudice is directed against *general opinions*, which he holds, or is supposed to hold, no benefit can arise from attempting, in an exordium, to defend those opinions; nor from alluding to them in any form, except in some rare case, where a prompt disavowal may remove at once, some injurious mistake. But if he is aware that the hearers are preoccupied with unfavourable impressions, as to the particular *subject* he is about to discuss, his first aim evidently should be, so to present that subject, if possible, as not to strengthen, but to obviate those impressions.

Supposing however, the preacher to be satisfied, that no *prejudice* of the hearers exists to frustrate the effect of his discourse,



still he is to presume that their *ignorance*, or at least their *indifference* to divine things, will present powerful obstacles to his success. He must therefore introduce his subject, so that it shall promise to be intelligible to them, and interesting; so that they shall be attracted to listen, and gradually disarmed of that deadly insensibility, which bars up all the avenues of profitable instruction from the pulpit; so in short, that they shall become prepared spontaneously and earnestly, to “give heed to the things that are spoken.” An exordium, then, should possess the following properties:

In the first place, **SIMPLICITY.**

Here there is no room for artificial structure, and studied ornament of diction. Good taste absolutely forbids both the stiffness of aphoristic brevity, and the elaborate harmony of the stately and periodic style. It is an ancient precept, that no discourse should commence with a long sentence. All pompous allusions, Horace condemns as splendid patches on an introduction, which render it ridiculous; such as “the grove and altar of Diana; the stream winding through beautiful fields; the majestic river, and the rainbow.”

All those warm *appeals to the passions* or imagination, which may be highly proper in the sequel of a discourse, are entirely out of place at the beginning. The obvious reason is, the hearers come together with their hearts cold, and their thoughts dissipated by intercourse with a thousand minor objects. They can no more be started into high emotion by a fervid stroke of eloquence, than a mountain of ice can be dissolved in a moment, before the blaze of a taper. Besides, were it practicable to awaken this sudden ardour of feeling, it would not be desirable. High emotion is necessarily transient. He who thinks himself able to keep up its full intensity through a long discourse, needs only a few lessons from experience to undeceive him. By striking his highest string at first, he compels himself to sink as he proceeds; and thus very unskilfully excites expectation, only to disappoint it. The discourse that begins in ecstasy, to be consistent with itself, must end in phrenzy. A good judge on

this subject says, “ reserve your fire: bold thoughts and figures are never relished, till the mind is heated and thoroughly engaged, which is never the case at the commencement. Homer employs not a single simile, in the first book of the *Iliad*, nor in the first book of the *Odyssey*.” And another says, “ You must in the beginning speak gently, remembering that your auditors are yet neither in heaven, nor in the air, but upon the earth, and in a place of worship.

Under the head of simplicity, I remark too, that an introduction should not exhibit a *display of learning*. Grammatical and philological observations, the names and opinions of celebrated men, and in general, whatever looks like ostentation of extensive reading, is to be avoided as much as possible in this part of a sermon.

It should not be *abstruse*. Controversial speculation, metaphysical subtilties, protracted and profound argumentation, abstract thoughts and language, are entirely unsuitable while as yet the minds of those we address are prepared only for that which is perspicuous and familiar.

It should not be *abrupt*. The general reason is, that a bold dash upon the hearers at first, is not congruous with the cool state they are in, nor with the steady and increasing interest, which we wish to preserve in their minds. Extraordinary circumstances may justify the departure from any rules, which common sense prescribes for common cases. Such was the sudden and vehement attack on Cataline, with which Cicero opened his first oration against that conspirator. Chrysostom, after an earthquake, began a sermon thus: “ Do you see the power of God? Do you see the benignity of God?—Power, because the firm world he has shaken; benignity, because the falling world he has sustained.” And Flechier commenced a funeral discourse thus: “ With what design, Sirs, are you assembled here? What view have you of my ministry? Am I come to dazzle you with the glory of terrestrial honours?”

But those abrupt exordiums which denote a studied eccentricity in the preacher, are without apology. The most faulty

examples of this kind, that I have seen, are in the sermons, (as they are called,) of Sterne. On the text "His commandments are not grievous;"—he begins—"No,—they are not grievous my dear auditors." After the text: "For we trust that we have a good conscience;" he exclaims—"Trust!—*trust* we have a good conscience!"—On the text: "It is better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting;" his first sentence is: "That I deny." The first of these examples is tolerable; but the others, especially the last, is a puerile effort at witticism, which a man of good taste might excuse in the tavern or circus, but which he must reprobate in the house of God.

In the second place, another quality requisite in an exordium, is **PERTINENCE**. It should correspond with the subject, and the occasion. Writers on oratory have often adverted to the fact, that both Demosthenes and Cicero were accustomed to compose introductions beforehand, from which they might make a selection in case of an emergency. The reason assigned for this, is the importance, and at the same time the difficulty, of beginning well an address, when there had been little opportunity for preparation: and while neither the speaker nor the hearers have as yet become deeply interested in the subject. Unquestionably these great masters of oratory might devise a few sentences, adapted to the general state of affairs, which might be made the preface to the discussion of almost any topic. But the preacher is seldom called to an unpremeditated effort; and so constant is the repetition of his public services, that he would soon find an expedient like the one just mentioned, utterly fallacious. It is an indispensable quality of an exordium that it should be engaging. This it cannot be, if it consists only of thoughts which are trite or trivial. The preacher may begin by descanting on some such point as,—the *vanity of the world*,—the *brevity of human life*,—the *worth of the soul*,—the *calamities of the fall*; but it requires no common skill and vivacity to give interest to an assembly, in that which they have heard a thousand times repeated.

Now *pertinence* promotes *variety*. The important difference as to variety between general subjects and those which are particular, is this ; the former are few, obvious, and to all men who reflect at all, familiar. While particular subjects are as various as the endless diversity that exists in the properties and relations of things. So far then as interest depends on *variety*, we have only to select various subjects for sermons, and to make the exordium of each appropriate, and the end is accomplished. I am aware that there is one kind of introduction, which, though limited to the subject in hand, is void of interest, because it recurs in formal routine, on every Sabbath. It consists in a strain of indefinite remarks, bespeaking attention to what shall be delivered, on account of its *immense importance*, and the *momentous consequences* connected with the manner in which it shall be received.

Those Introductions which cast a preparatory light on the subject from the context, may easily unite the advantages of simplicity and pertinence. And there is a peculiar felicity in this connexion, where it can be exhibited in the form of narrative.

In the third place, **DELICACY** is another indispensable quality of a good exordium.

There is a becoming congruity between the preacher's work, and the air of religious sensibility and reverence with which he should engage in its appropriate duties. When he enters the place consecrated to Jehovah, the reflection, "This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven," should repress all feelings that do not accord with the dignity and sanctity of his business. The same Luther who braved the anathemas of the Roman Pontiff, always ascended the pulpit with trembling knees. But besides this aspect of religious awe, which a deep feeling of divine things will certainly impart to the preacher, there is a decorum of manner, which will arise from a proper respect to his hearers. Where this is wanting, they will not fail to perceive it, and to be instinctively prepossessed against what he shall deliver.

But we must not mistake the character of that modesty which is becoming in a preacher. It is not a timid, tremulous manner of saying things, which seems to imply that he does but half believe his own sentiments. The divine commission to Jeremiah was: "Arise and speak unto the people all that I command thee;—be not afraid of their faces." And Paul besought his brethren to pray for him, "that he might speak boldly as he ought to speak." Certainly no commendation is due to that modesty in a preacher, which makes him "ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Nor does real modesty any more require those formal *apologies*, with which sermons are often introduced. When a preacher compliments an assembly with the assurance, that he considers them as *very enlightened* and respectable; that through the weakness of his powers, or the want of preparation in the present case, he is conscious that what he shall deliver will be unworthy of their attention; it may seem to result from an amiable self-diffidence. But judicious hearers will suspect, and often suspect truly, that pride is speaking under the cloak of humility.

At the bar, or in the senate, the public speaker may with happy effect, sometimes allude, by way of apology for himself, to his want of health, or want of time for preparation, to the inexperience of youth, or the imbecility of age. But the same indulgence is by no means allowed to the Christian preacher. The exhibition of himself, in any form, is so inconsistent with the sacred delicacy and elevation of his work, that it rarely fails to excite disgust.

Before I dismiss the article of delicacy as a becoming property of an introduction, allow me to say, that it absolutely forbids an angry, austere or querulous manner of address. He knows but little of men, who does not know that harsh and acrimonious language is adapted to produce unsanctified resentment, rather than evangelical repentance. He may imagine that fidelity to the truth requires him to assume a frowning front; to arraign his hearers with a *magisterial* air, and bid defiance to the

sentiments they may entertain of him and his doctrines. But while they may be satisfied perhaps, that his religion has made him fearless and honest, they will hardly be persuaded that it has made him either a lovely man, or a wise preacher. Love and gentleness win upon the affections, while asperity and threatening fortify the heart against persuasion. Depend upon it, a sermon, however excellent in other respects, will be lost to the hearers, if it assails them, with an angry commencement.

In the fourth place, an exordium should be JUDICIOUS AS TO LENGTH.

I say *judicious*, because what is proper in each case, must be determined by the subject and the circumstances. Many of the old divines extended this part of their discourses to a tedious prolixity; while others, in modern times, both among the English and the French, have adopted the opposite extreme, and have passed from the text to the discussion, with only a sentence or two of introduction. This matter, however, should be regulated by sober principles, and not by caprice. The wise traveller will adjust the rapidity of his first movements, and the length of his stages, to the extent of his whole journey. If the subject to be discussed by the preacher is very copious, the exordium should be brief, to make room for the subsequent matter. If the sermon, on the other hand, is to contain but few thoughts, it is a very inadequate remedy for the defect, to postpone the consideration of these, by an attenuated introduction. I have sometimes been pained at the want of skill, which leads a man to select a subject extensive enough for five sermons, and then to occupy in loose, prefatory remarks, one third of the time allotted to his discourse. The most common characteristic of such introductions, is sterile and languid declamation. The preacher begins perhaps, with the charms of Eden, the primitive innocence and felicity of man, his fatal seduction by the subtlety of the tempter, his apostacy, and his expulsion from Paradise. Then follow, in regular gradation, the miseries of the fall, and the wonderful plan of redemption. Besides the disproportionate *length* to which these tame exordiums are apt

to be extended, they are too miscellaneous, and too trite, to awaken interest. The preacher is so much at leisure, that every trifle by the way-side attracts his attention; and his subject, (if indeed he has one,) is forgotten. In this case, no congruity of parts is maintained, no regard to the maxim:

“Primo ne medium, medio ne discrepet imum.”

The fault indeed is not so much that subsequent matter is inconsistent with what had preceded, as that the sermon is a dull repetition of thoughts anticipated in the introduction, some of which might have been vivid and interesting, in their proper place and order.

Two hints, founded as I think on careful observation, will close this lecture. One is, that young writers of sermons, are extremely apt to dilate all the first thoughts of a sermon, from an apprehension that their stock of materials to complete it, will be too soon exhausted. The other is, that a similar diffuseness may be expected, when a man is too indolent or unskilful to look through his subject, and arrange its parts, before he begins to write. In this case, his introduction will almost of course be inappropriate, and tedious in length.

## LECTURE VII.

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### EXPLICATION OF TEXT.—THREE GENERAL PRECAUTIONS.— PROPOSITION.

As the *subject* is the basis of a sermon, this ought in the first place, to be very distinctly apprehended by the preacher, before he can be prepared to state it clearly, to enforce it by argument, and to apply it with power to the conscience. It ought also to be fairly contained in the passage from which it is professedly deduced, as I have shown at some length in discussing choice of texts. It is this unquestionable principle, that the subject of a Christian sermon ought to be derived from the *oracles of God*, which often makes the *explication* of the text necessary, before the subject of discourse is announced. As very few remarks will be requisite on that part of a sermon, which we call *proposition*, I shall defer these till I have considered what is proper in explaining a text, when this is required.

It ought then to be taken for granted, that no man will attempt to discuss a text in public, while he does not suppose himself to be possessed of its true meaning. Not that absolute certainty concerning every passage, is essential or attainable. A man of the clearest conceptions, with the best aids which learning can furnish, may sometimes be in doubt, among the different senses that have been attached to a passage, which is the true one. But instead of obtruding his doubts on his *hearers*,



professing to enlighten their minds, while his own gropes in darkness, Christian discretion prescribes a shorter course, namely, to let that passage alone in the pulpit;—at least not to make it a subject of a sermon. “A man,” says Claude, “who needs to be told that he ought not to preach on a text before he *understands* it, needs at the same time to be informed, that he is fitter for any other profession than that of the Ministry.”

But when there is no real *difficulty* in the sense of a passage, it is often useful to notice the occasion and circumstances with which it is connected, for the sake of a more vivid *impression*. When this is done by allusion to the context, especially when a simple statement of facts is all that is required, such an explanation of the text very properly falls into the exordium. I may add, that in much the greater number of cases, this familiar preparation to announce the subject of discourse, is the best that can be adopted. There must however, be instances, in which a regular explanation of the text is necessary, to show the hearers that it contains the sentiment which the preacher deduces from it. In such a case he must resort to those laws of sacred criticism, by which, as an interpreter of the Bible, and a theologian, his inquiries should be guided. To give instruction in these, is not the business of Sacred Rhetoric. The Students of this Seminary however, are presumed to be well grounded in these principles, by the very able course of instruction, which regularly precedes their entrance upon the composition of sermons. But as the great end of sacred philology is the elucidation of divine truth, and that for the benefit of common understandings; the *critic* and the *preacher* must to some extent be combined; and it often becomes a question, how far the *literary habits* of the *former* are to be modified by the *practical wisdom* of the *latter*. You sit down at your study table to investigate an interesting passage of Scripture, with a view to bring forth its real import, in a sermon. But there is an important difference between the process by which you examine that text, to *ascertain* its meaning, and that by which you are to *exhibit* that meaning to plain hearers. In the first case, you act as an etymologist, and a critic; in the other, as a “teacher of babes.” It

would seem, if we judge from facts, that there are extremes on different sides of this subject ; and to guard the young preacher against these, by suggesting a few plain principles of common sense, is all that is required by the plan of these lectures.

1. *The preacher may err, by taking it for granted that some GREAT DIFFICULTY* is to be encountered in every passage. With this spirit he will come to the Bible, as the empiric does to his patient, resolved, at all events, to find occasion for the display of his professional skill. He will magnify difficulties, when they *exist*, and *create* them, when they do not. The medical student must make it his business to investigate human diseases ;—shall he therefore presume that every man he meets is sick ? No more must the biblical student take it for granted that every part of the sacred oracles is full of mystery, because critical research is necessary, to elucidate passages that are *really* obscure. In all points that are essential to salvation, the Bible is a *plain* book. Should we admit that, as to its great purposes, it is so obscure that its meaning cannot be understood by common men, till it is explained by critics and commentators, and that these are entitled to exact from the unlearned an *implicit confidence*, then the grand principle of Protestantism, that “ the Bible is the only rule of faith,” applies merely to the initiated few ;—that is, the Bible is the rule to *critics*, and critics the rule to *common men*. What advantage then has the Protestant over the Catholic ? If unlearned, neither has any Bible. From one, it is locked up in the arcana of *criticism* ;—from the other, in the arcana of an *unknown tongue* ; and to both, their authorised teachers are lords of their conscience. As Protestants therefore, we must maintain that the Bible in its great outlines is intelligible to plain men, in whatever translation, provided that such translation is a faithful one ; and provided also, that it is studied with a candid, devout spirit.

The language of this sacred book is not technical nor philosophical, but more familiar than that of any other book, ancient or modern. It was written chiefly, by *plain* men, unaccustomed to the abstract phraseology of science. It was written

for the use of plain men, such as have always constituted, and always must constitute the great majority of our race. It was written, too, for purposes equally *important* to the *illiterate*, as to the *learned*, namely to be the foundation of their faith and hope, and the directory of their conduct, as candidates for eternity. From the benevolence of God then, in giving this book to men, and from the design for which he gave it, it would be reasonable to presume, that, in its grand characteristics as a guide to heaven, all who read it with humility, integrity, and common intelligence, as to its *principal* contents, must be able to understand its meaning. Accordingly we find that the body of plain, pious men, whose minds are unperturbed by prejudice, *have correctly understood* the great outlines of religious truth contained in the Bible. In respect to these, the *coincidence* of views expressed in their *formularies of faith*, drawn up in ages and countries remote from each other, would be an absolute miracle, on any other supposition, than that one leading system of truth, is stamped in characters of light, on the sacred pages. That such coincidence of views has existed, is a fact placed beyond all question by the evidence of history. The general *correctness* of these views is not invalidated, but confirmed, by the profoundest investigations of criticism.

And why should we *expect* it to be otherwise? The great Teacher, who came from God, was predicted as one “anointed to preach the gospel to the *poor*.” In the best sense of the word, he was preeminently a *popular* preacher. “The common people heard him gladly,” because his instructions were so simple and familiar, that they easily understood him. But I need not enlarge on this topic. It is preposterous for the preacher to treat plain declarations of the Bible, as though he considered them to be involved in mystery. Yet,

2. *The preacher may err, by taking it for granted, that the most OBVIOUS sense of a text, is ALWAYS THE TRUE SENSE.* A little reflection will satisfy any one that this could not be reasonably expected. The *diversity* of language contained in the Bible, must be somewhat correspondent with the diversity of in-

dividual taste and manner among its writers. Its *matter* too, consisting of history, poetry, prophecy, biography, precept and doctrine, necessarily occasions great variety in its phraseology. The frequent allusions, especially in the Old Testament, to *local* usages, to customs of *different ages*, and such as were peculiar to *eastern* countries ; the *metaphors* taken from such local usages, or from local objects or facts, present many points of difficulty to those who read the Bible, in countries and periods *remote* from those in which it was written. I would by no means intimate that scriptural figures are of course obscure. So far from this, is the fact, that when they are taken from familiar objects, and expressed in simple terms, the meaning conveyed is instantaneously and forcibly impressed on the mind. Still it is certain, that not figures, merely, but allusions to oriental customs, are sometimes unintelligible, except to men of reading. To mention one brief example, in which a phrase, according to the obvious import of its words, expresses no meaning at all. Moses says to Israel ; “ The land whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, whence ye came out ; where thou sowedst thy seed and *wateredst it with thy foot* ; but the land whither ye go, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven.” Any plain man might see that here a difference is alluded to between two countries, in one of which the ground is watered by some artificial process, and in the other by rain. But he would attach no meaning to the phrase, “ *wateredst it with thy foot* ;” unless he happened to know that, on the borders of the Nile, large cisterns were provided, that the roots of vegetables might be refreshed by water, which was distributed from these cisterns, through small trenches ; and to which the gardener gave a new direction at any time, by turning the earth against it with his foot.

In some cases where no *figure* is used, the obvious, literal sense of a passage, is not its true sense ; at least, as it must be understood by modern readers generally. For example ; our Saviour says, “ When thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face.” It is a simple injunction that his disciples, on

such occasions, should appear in the *usual* manner ; in distinction from hypocrites, who, as a signal of special devotion, covered their heads, or wore ashes on their faces, that their sanctity might attract observation. But where there is no such *common custom* as anointing the head, a literal conformity to this precept would be a violation of its spirit ; because the man who is keeping a private fast, would proclaim this to his neighbors, by an external sign ; the very thing which Christ forbids.

These examples are selected, not as presenting difficulties to the critic, but as familiarly illustrating the principle, that we must often look beyond the *phraseology* of a text to ascertain its meaning. Of course, the preacher cannot take it for granted that the *common interpretation* is right. A general and spontaneous concurrence of opinions, as to the meaning of a passage in the Bible, or in any other book, would be presumptive evidence that such opinion is correct. The weight of this evidence however, would be great or small, according to circumstances in a given case. And in no case can it be sufficient to supersede a personal examination, in one who is a professed interpreter of the sacred oracles.

Still it should be said,

3. *That it must not be his aim to find a NEW sense to his text.*

Whatever danger results from a tame submission to authority on this subject, the attractions of *novelty* are still more dangerous, to a man of sprightly genius, not matured by experience and judgment. To exhibit the points of difference between his opinions and those of others, gives opportunity to display at once, the extent of his reading, and the superiority of his discernment. But how does such puerile ostentation accord with the dignity of his office, who is “ a servant of the most high God, to show unto men the way of salvation.”

No translation or commentary is to be regarded as exempt from the scrutiny of criticism ; nor need we scruple to say, on any proper occasion, that the received English version of the Bible has many inaccuracies and defects. Yet to assail this ver-

sion from the pulpit, on all occasions; and thus to invalidate its authority with common minds, while we admit its correctness, as to the great outlines of divine truth, is a mistake, which no preacher of good sense will commit. Besides, in this case it is oftener pedantry than learning, that is displayed. One of those venerable men, who assisted in forming this version, being afterwards on a journey, heard its defects pointed out, to an illiterate congregation, by a very young preacher, who, in one instance assigned three reasons why a word should have been differently translated. In the evening, the learned divine said to the young man: "You might have preached a more useful sermon to these poor hearers. The king's translators considered well the *three* reasons which you have suggested for another rendering of that word; but they were induced by *thirteen* weightier reasons, to prefer the rendering that was adopted."

On this point, I am happy to express my own views in the language of Dr. Campbell, who was at once an enlightened scholar and a judicious preacher. "Particular care," says he, "ought to be taken, in expounding the Scriptures, not to appear over-learned, and over-critical. There is no occasion to obtrude on an audience, as some do, all the jarring interpretations given by different commentators; for this knowledge can serve no other purpose than to distract their thoughts. Before you begin to build, it is necessary to remove such impediments as lie directly in your way; but you could not account him other than a very foolish builder, who should first collect a deal of rubbish, which was not in his way, and could not have obstructed his work, that he might have the pleasure and merit of removing it. And do the fantastic, absurd, and contradictory glosses of commentators deserve a better name than rubbish? No, surely. Where a false gloss cannot be reasonably supposed to be either known or thought of by the audience, it is in the preacher worse than being idly ostentatious of his learning, to introduce such erroneous gloss or comment."

We must always remember too, the difference between a church and a college. In most Christian congregations

there are very few, if any linguists. I do not say that we ought never to mention the original. Justice to the passage we explain, may sometimes require it. Nor is it necessary that our translators should be deemed infallible. But then, on the other hand, it is neither modest nor prudent in the preacher, especially if a young man, to be at every turn censuring the translators, and pretending to mend their version. It is not modest; as they over whom the corrector assumes a superiority, are allowed on all hands, to have been men of eminent talents and erudition. And it is not prudent, as this practice never fails to produce, in the minds of the people, a want of confidence in their Bible. Indeed, in regard to every thing which may be introduced, either in the way of criticism or comment, it is not enough that such an observation is just, that such an interpretation has been actually given, or that such an opinion has been maintained;—the previous inquiry which the preacher ought to make by himself is, whether it be of any consequence to the people to be informed of the observation, comment, or opinion. If on other occasions, more especially on this, the apostolical admonition ought to be sacredly observed, that “nothing proceed out of the speaker’s mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.”

On the literary vanity, which employs an excess of criticism, in the pulpit, I add one more remark, that it has no countenance from the highest of all examples, that of our Lord and his Apostles. The great body of primitive Christians, had access to the Hebrew scriptures chiefly through a *translation*; and one less perfect, unquestionably, than the common version in *our* language. Yet the first preachers of Christianity, qualified as they certainly were, to correct all mistakes, by gifts more adequate than those of scholarship, “never perplexed their hearers with various readings and various renderings.”

You may say perhaps, of what value to me as a Christian teacher, or to my hearers, is my critical knowledge, if I am not to use it? I answer, of the same value with any other knowledge, if you have not discretion to use it aright; that is, of no

value at all. You may have a knowledge of *grammar*, and make it subservient to the great business of the pulpit, without giving your hearers in every sermon, a disquisition upon etymology and syntax. Your *logic* may be made the instrument of instruction and conviction to sinners, without acquainting them with the ten categories of Aristotle, or the difference between abstract and concrete terms. Your *eloquence* may melt your hearers, while they know not that you have read Quinetilian or Longinus; and care not whether the figure that thrilled their bosoms, has been called *metonymy* or *apostrophe*, in technical rhetoric. Just so you may use your knowledge of sacred criticism, without abusing it. From its stores, humility and good sense may draw the richest instruction for your hearers, without ostentation on your part, or perplexity on theirs.

Thus far, the way before us has seemed to be obvious. That the preacher may announce the true meaning of his text, as the subject of discourse, he must first ascertain this meaning. In doing this, he must not presume that the true sense of the passage is wrapped up in mystery; nor that it is of course so plain as to render examination superfluous; nor, when it is plain, that he is at liberty to display his ingenuity or learning, by inventing some novel interpretation.

But it may be said, the chief inquiry still remains, by what process is he to determine for himself, that he may exhibit to his hearers, the true meaning of his text. Were I competent to the undertaking, it would be preposterous to turn aside from the proper object of these lectures, to discuss the science of biblical criticism, or even to give the briefest outline of this science. Writers of sermons, who are still members of this sacred Seminary, may avail themselves of the ample system of instruction in this department, which belongs to their regular theological course. Other young preachers, who have not enjoyed these or similar advantages, may easily find access to books, which will give important aid to their investigations. In the absence of all others, the little manual of *Ernesti*, entitled "*Elements*



of *Interpretation*," translated with notes by *Professor Stuart*, will be found an invaluable treasury of elementary principles.

Having remarked at so much length on the practical principles to be observed by the preacher in explaining a text, when its meaning is doubtful, I shall be brief in noticing the other topic, which belongs to this lecture ; namely, the *proposition* of the subject.

The term *proposition*, as used in *logic*, is applicable only to an assemblage of words, in which something is *affirmed*. As used by writers on *oratory*, it is not restricted to this sense, but applies to any form of expression, in which the *subject of a discourse is announced*. Thus, if my text were ; "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not," I might say, we are called to consider as the subject of this discourse, the "*universal sinfulness of men*:" or, I might reduce it to a logical affirmation, and say,—the doctrine of the text is, "*that all men are sinners*." Either form amounts to what rhetoricians mean by a proposition of the subject ; though I would not say that, in all circumstances, either form is equally good. If you take the former method, you have indeed a subject before you, but you feel at liberty to treat it in the way of discursive remarks. If you take the logical proposition, you are pledged to one course : you must *prove* the thing affirmed, before you make it the subject of inference or exhortation. A sermon written under such a necessity, is more likely to possess unity, and to combine to the best advantage, instruction with impression.

For reasons that are obvious to every mind, the doctrine or duty to be discussed in the sermon, should be announced in the proposition, with as much *brevity* and *clearness* as possible.

Two circumstances, in this connexion, deserve some regard. One is, that when you are prepared to state your subject, the form of expression employed, should be such, as to give the hearers a *momentary premonition* that you are about to do it.

For example ; "The doctrine which is taught in the text,

and which I shall endeavour to establish in the following discourse, is this, that the only possibility of human salvation, consistent with the character and government of God, is suspended on the atonement of Christ." Now, if language like this is employed, every intelligent hearer will perceive that you are about to announce your subject *before* you have done it; and accordingly that sentence of your sermon, which it is more important for him to remember than any other, he will be more likely to remember. But many preachers would reverse the order of members, in the example given above, and consequently the hearers, being told in the end of a complex sentence, that the subject of the sermon *was* stated at the beginning of it, may recall the statement, if they can.

The other circumstance is, that the terms employed in stating the subject, should be such, if possible, as not to call for *explanation* after the proposition is announced.

## LECTURE VIII.

### UNITY.

When the preacher has ascertained the sense of his text, and, after a proper exordium, has placed his subject distinctly before his hearers, he must proceed in some method to elucidate and apply this subject. The next thing that comes regularly to be considered in the structure of sermons, is *division*. But you are aware, gentlemen, that many object to divisions, especially to regular and explicit divisions, in a sermon ;—because, as it is said, they are inconsistent with *unity*. This objection is not merely the offspring of a fastidious or fanciful taste ; it has been made by men of respectable name. The Archbishop of Cambray, whose judgment is entitled to high regard, says ; “ There remains no true *unity* after such divisions ; seeing they make two or three discourses which are joined into one, only by an arbitrary connexion.” And Bishop Burnet, himself an excellent preacher, recommends that a sermon should have “ *one* head and *only* one, well stated and fully set out.”

The canons of rhetoric invariably require *unity*, not only in dramatic and epic poetry, but also in oratory. And every one who has learned his first lessons in sacred eloquence, admits without doubting, that unity is an essential attribute of a good sermon. Now, though the same precision of language is not de-

manded here, as in the abstract sciences, it is perfectly obvious that men of good sense seem to differ on this subject, because they have been accustomed to attach no definite meaning to their words. It becomes necessary then to examine the question, what *is* unity in a sermon?—and the importance of this point to our main business, requires that the examination shall be extended through this Lecture.

In entering on this subject, let me say, I do not mean by unity that *sameness* which excludes all interesting variety of thought and illustration in a discourse. If twenty pieces of coin, stamped with the same die, are spread before you, each is so perfectly like the rest, that though you turn them over and over, you see the same object still without variety. If you travel across an extended plain of arid sand, stretching around you, in a wide, unchanging scene of barrenness, there too you have *oneness, without variety*. But how soon do you long for a hill, a rivulet, a cottage, a tree, or even a shrub, to relieve you from this intolerable unity of prospect. If you stand on the deck of a ship, in mid-ocean, on the morning of a calm summer's day, you contemplate this vast expanse of waters with emotions of sublimity. But how soon does the eye become weary of a scene, which presents nothing but one immense, unvarying, unmeaning uniformity? Suppose now you sail down a majestic river; here, on its banks, a flourishing village meets your eye; there, a rugged cliff; there, cultivated fields; and there, a tributary stream rushes down from the neighboring mountains. Or suppose you travel a *great road*, leading through a fertile country, interspersed with meadows, and forests, with the splendour of wealth and the simplicity of rustic life. In these cases, the *unity*, of the *river* or the *road*, is associated with an interesting *variety*. You glance at the changing scenery as you pass on, and feel the vivacity which it inspires, without being at all diverted from your chief object.

Now, to apply these illustrations to the purpose in hand. There is a kind of unity in a sermon, which indeed is in no danger of distracting the attention of hearers, by the multiplicity of

objects presented. It consists in a constant recurrence of the same thought, attenuated and repeated with undeviating uniformity. The hearers pass on with the preacher, not from one branch of the discourse to another, delighted with the richness of matter and variety of illustration; but from one topic, presented again, with some trifling changes of representation. The above sort of taste, indeed, does not always deign, in this last particular, to humour the caprice of hearers. It gives them over and over the same favorite thoughts, in the same favorite expressions; and often very consistently completes its claims to their attention, by a favorite monotony in delivery. Nor is this sameness limited to a single discourse of the preacher;—it extends, perhaps, through the whole range of his instructions; so that whatever reason the hearers may have to expect a new *text*, they have the advantage of foreseeing, essentially, what the *sermon* will be, from sabbath to sabbath. Now, if this is the indispensable quality in sermons which we call unity, it is one, as all will agree, in which it is the province of dullness to excel. But to suppose that our hearers are benefited by such a sameness, in the pulpit, is to suppose that when they enter a place of worship, they cease to be men. Correct views on this subject, are to be acquired only by studying the human mind, in its general operations. That acute and able writer, the late Professor Brown, in analyzing the philosophy of emotions, has the following remarks, which I quote with pleasure, as strengthening the illustrations already given. “Even objects that originally excited the highest interest, if long continued, cease to interest, and soon become painful. Who, that is not absolutely deaf, could sit for a whole day, in a music room, if the same air without variation, were begun again in the very instant of its last note? The most beautiful couplet, of the most beautiful poem, if repeated to us without intermission, for a very few minutes, would excite more uneasiness than could have been felt from the single recitation of the dullest stanza, of the most soporific inditer of rhymes. How weary are we of many of the lines of our best poets, which are quoted to us forever, by those who

read only what *others quote*. What we admired when we read it first, fatigues and disappoints us, when we meet with it so often; and the author appears to us almost trite and common in his most original images, merely because these images are so very beautiful, as to have become some of the common places of rhetorical selection.

Notwithstanding our certainty that a road without one turn, must lead us to our journey's end, it would be to our mind, and thus indirectly to our body also, which is soon weary when the mind is weary, the most fatiguing of all roads. A very long avenue is sufficiently wearying, even when we see the house that is at the end of it. But what patience could travel for a whole day, along one endless avenue, with perfect parallelism of the two straight lines, and with trees of the same species and height succeeding each other exactly at the same intervals? In a journey like this, there would be the same comfort in being blind, as there would in a little temporary deafness, in the case before imagined of the same unvaried melody, endlessly repeated in the music room. The uniformity of similar trees, at similar distances, would itself be most wearisome. But what we should feel with far more uneasiness, would be the constant disappointment of our expectation, that the last tree, which we beheld in the distance, would be the last that would rise upon us; when tree after tree as in mockery of our patience itself, would still present the same dismal continuity of line."

I need not be more particular in applying these illustrations. As men are constituted, they demand *variety* in intellectual subjects, as well as in material. And the preacher of good sense, will never be anxious to attain that unity in his public instructions, which excludes a proper variety.

What then *is* the unity so important to be observed in the composition of a sermon? I answer, it requires that the sermon should be,

*In the first place, ONE IN SUBJECT.*

It will be unnecessary to dwell on this point, farther than to explain my meaning. The preacher may have but one chief sub-

ject in his eye, and yet manage so unskilfully as, by way of preparatory remark, to suggest a number of distinct subjects, which will preoccupy the attention of the hearers, and leave a divided impression on their minds. This is especially liable to be the case, when a sermon commences with *critical discussions*, extended to some length. As an example of this fault, I mention Claude's plan on the text,—Acts II, 27. "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." The subject is, the resurrection of Christ. Before entering on this, however, he would discuss two other points. In the first place, he would show that the language of the Psalmist, quoted in the text, was correctly understood by Peter, as referring to Christ. In the second place, he would refute the opinion of the Romish Church respecting Christ's descent into what they call "*limbus patrum*," as grounded on the word *hell* in the text, which in this case means the state of the dead. But with whatever propriety these several topics might be embraced in an expository lecture; a *sermon* on the resurrection of Christ, would evidently be ruined by a formal, preparatory discussion of Peter's inspiration, and of a gross superstition, founded on a verbal mistake. The former should be taken for granted; and the latter, noticed in the briefest manner possible, while explaining the terms of the text.

There is another way in which the above principle is violated. The preacher, from an apprehension of falling short in matter, or from a false notion that his hearers will be edified, in proportion to the range of topics in each sermon, contrives to bring before them every sabbath, the *whole system of religion*. Every subject, which has any affinity to the one in hand, comes in for its share of attention. Thus in considering the question of Pilate, "What is truth?" the hearers are gravely told, that all truths have a common foundation, and a common connexion one with another; and hence it comes fairly within the compass of the sermon, to speak of *every thing* which is *true*. In regard to the violation of unity by such a heterogeneous assemblage of matter, the preacher might often receive admonition, by attempt-

ing to fix on a brief *title* to his discourse ; or even by searching for a *psalm* or *hymn*, *appropriate* to his subject.

*In the second place, unity requires that a sermon should be ONE IN DESIGN.*

The wise preacher will propose to himself some chief *effect* which he hopes to produce, by every discourse. This is a distinct thing from the *subject* of discourse ; just as the same end, in other cases, may be sought by various means. Thus, if you would make sinners feel their guilt, your direct subject may be either their obligations or their transgressions. If you would console a good man in affliction, your subject may be, the perfection of God's providence, or the benefit of afflictions. If you would inculcate the obligation of children to love their parents, you may do this by preaching on filial affection, as a direct subject, or on the character of Joseph, as an indirect one. The good to be accomplished by a sermon, whatever is its subject, must depend very much on its adaptedness to leave on the hearers' minds some specific and predominant impression. Whether it bears upon insensibility, or error, or vice ; whether it is designed to alarm the careless sinner, or to strengthen the wavering Christian, its bearing should be distinctly seen and felt. This requires not only that the sermon should *have* a definite subject and a definite design, but that these should be constantly *in the preacher's eye*. "It is a favorite method with me," said Cecil, "to reduce the text to some point of doctrine. On that topic I enlarge, and then apply it. I like to ask myself, 'What are you doing?—What is your aim?'"

This leads me to remark,

*In the third place, that unity requires a sermon to be ONE IN THE ADJUSTMENT OF ITS PARTS TO THE PRINCIPAL END, AND TO EACH OTHER.* And here I lay it down as an elementary principle of great importance, *that a discourse should be adapted to produce an effect as a WHOLE.* This principle was substantially stated above, but is here varied in form, for the sake of a more extended illustration. It is not enough that there is a succession of good words, or of striking sentences, or of brilliant



paragraphs, or even of weighty, detached thoughts. The choice and arrangement of matter should be such, as to produce a growing interest in the auditors, and to leave a strong impression of the *subject* on their minds. This supposes the preacher, before writing, to have examined well the materials of which the sermon is to consist, and to have settled with himself the *order* in which these are to be disposed, to the best advantage.

There is no work of art in which this principle of unity is not essential to perfection. The architect studies the *purpose*, for which a building is intended, while he adjusts its parts in his whole plan. Is it a *church*? It must have one chief apartment, so designed as to accommodate a whole assembly, in listening to one speaker, and uniting in the same acts of devotion, at the same time. Is it a *senate house*? Its dimensions, apartments, and proportions, must correspond with the particular *end* of its construction. Is it a *private dwelling*? Here again the main *purpose* must be kept in sight; and such a relation preserved between different stories, and different rooms, as the convenience of the occupants may require. Is it a *country seat*? The skilful architect will employ what is called the prophetic eye of taste. He will anticipate just what the principal edifice, and the subordinate buildings will be when finished. It is not a fine column, or window, or gateway, that makes a beautiful seat, but the combined effect of symmetry and fitness, which strikes the eye, in the structure and its appendages, when viewed as a whole.

So with the *landscape gardener*. Give him a rude spot to transform into a beautiful garden; and he sees by anticipation, how each part of the grounds must be shaped, where each avenue must pass, and each tree and shrub must stand, when the plan is completed; and "when he plants a seedling, he already sits under its shade." So the *historic painter*, if he would represent a shipwreck, must not be satisfied to show you a broken mast or cable. Nor yet must he show you the mariners clinging to a tempest beaten ship, while other ships in the same prospect are becalmed. The heavens must frown with blackness, and the

ocean swell in angry surges, and spread before you a *consistent* scene of terrific sublimity.

So the *portrait* painter must not exhaust his skill on a single feature, but must exhibit the united expression of all the features. in the human face divine.”

“Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call ;  
But the joint force and full result of all.”

So the epic or dramatic *poet*, must not set before you an incongruous succession of characters or incidents, violating all probability and consistency. He must show you a *train* of things, growing in interest, and leading on to some common result. Shakspeare, though he has been called the stumbling block of critics, as often inelegant, obscure, and ungrammatical in style ; and though he pays little regard often, to what are called the unities of time and place, shews you men and things as they are. He not only pleases you with here and there a speech, but arrests your attention to the course of events ; fills you with a restless eagerness to keep up with his incidents ; and leaves you at last under some *strong impression*, that abides with you. Of this great dramatic poet Johnson says ; “ He who tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house for sale, carried a brick in his pocket, as a specimen.” When you have read Julius Cæsar, or Hamlet, you may be unable to repeat a single line, but you never can forget the *subject*.

I have extended these illustrations, to show that preaching is not exempt from the common laws which apply to all other things, where good sense and taste are to be exercised. A sermon should have unity of plan. The matter, length, and order of its parts should be so adjusted, as to preclude anticipation, repetition, and collision. Good judgment will not so much inquire, whether a thought is *important*, as whether it belongs to the subject in hand, and in what *place* it may be introduced, so as most to increase the general effect. That is not useful preaching, which is a mere *collection of good remarks*, without the

scope, connexion and impression, which belong to a regular discourse. Nor is that a profitable sermon, which now and then startles the hearers, with a vivid flash of thought, or makes them remember a few eccentric phrases;—but that which fixes their eye on a *single subject*; which holds their attention steadily to *that subject*; which gives them as they go on, a clearer perception and a deeper feeling of *that subject*; and finally compels them to *remember that subject*, though they cannot repeat one expression uttered by the preacher.

To accomplish this end, *I only add, fourthly, there must be* UNITY OF ILLUSTRATION. No mixing of topics in argument, or of incongruous images should be allowed to impair the object of a discourse.

—————“*Servetur ad imum,  
Qualis ab incepto processerit, et sibi constet.*”

Of a distinguished living preacher, it is remarked by a professed critic, that, “exuberant as are his resources, little or nothing is introduced by him, without a distinct reference to his main design. Every additional figure or idea, illustrative of his chief topic, serves, for the most part, to convey it more distinctly to the mind; and though Pelion is sometimes heaped upon Ossa, in his gigantic sport, we do not view it as a useless exertion, when he appears himself to be reaching heaven by the process, and showing us a path to the same elevation.”

Such is that unity which is worthy to be sought in the pulpit. It is not a sterile sameness; but it requires that a sermon should be one in subject, one in design, one in the adaptation of its parts to each other, and to the common effect, and one in illustration. Of course, unity does not forbid *divisions*; it only requires that these should not exhibit several *distinct* subjects, but only that they should present several *parts* of the *same* subject, as one complete whole. Against such a fault as that just alluded to, it will be our business to guard still farther, in considering the characteristics of a perfect division.

## LECTURE IX.

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DIVISION. OBJECTIONS TO ;—UTILITY OF ;—KINDS OF ;—  
RULES.

The objection that divisions in a sermon are inconsistent with *unity*, rendered it proper to consider, at length, in my last lecture, this most important principle in the sacred work of the preacher. Two other objections require a brief notice at this time.

It is sometimes said, that divisions give a stiff and mechanical appearance to a discourse ; that to announce its chief parts beforehand, is to take from it the charm of novelty, and to destroy the pleasure which an intelligent hearer would derive from discovering your method for himself.

But you must remember, that of those to whom the gospel is preached, only a small part are so intelligent, as to perceive that which is not very easily perceived. To adopt an occult method, because this is supposed to be most consistent with the rules of elegance, or because some obscurity furnishes exercise to the ingenuity of hearers, is a doubtful expedient, even in respect to *cultivated* minds ; but in respect to *plain* men, such as constitute the body of every congregation, it is, to say the least, a great error in judgment. If such hearers might be able to au-

alyze an obscure train of thought, in a *printed* discourse, this is not to be expected in one that is *spoken*, where they have no opportunity to examine and compare different parts.

The other objection is, that divisions are a scholastic device, unknown in the best days of ancient oratory.

That the celebrated orators of old, were less formal in this respect, than has been common in the modern sermon, is certain; and perhaps a sufficient reason for this appears in the object of their orations, and the character of those to whom they were addressed. But the most celebrated of those orations have method, and some of them, method very distinctly expressed. Cicero, in his oration for the Manilian law, has three divisions; the nature of the Mithridatic war;—the greatness of it;—and the choice of a proper general. The first of these heads is discussed under four minor heads.—the honor of the state;—the safety of their allies;—the public revenue,—and the interests of private citizens. The third head, too, has four minor heads. Pompey is recommended as a consummate general, for his military skill;—his courage;—his authority; and his success. The same orator, in his seventh Phillipic, dissuades the senate from making peace with Mark Anthony, by three heads of argument, showing the measure to be base, to be dangerous, and to be impracticable. In his oration for Muræna, the division has been allowed by some critics to be perfect. “The whole accusation, O judges, may be reduced to three heads; one consists in objections against his life; the second relates to the dignity of his office; the third includes the corruption, with which he is charged.”

His oration against Cecilius has two, and that for Publius Quinctius three general divisions.

To mention no other examples, Quintilian says, “divisions may be too many, but ought not, as some think, to be limited to three.” So much for an objection, drawn from antiquity, against that method in a discourse, which constituted so important a part of both theory and practice, in ancient eloquence.

We proceed now to consider the *utility* of divisions,—the different *kinds* that have been employed,—and the *rules* by which they should be conducted.

In remarking on the *utility* of method, let it be observed, that I mean to recommend a method which is *obvious* to the hearers ; and in general, one that is *announced* by the preacher, in entering on the discussion of his subject. Though his plan of thought may be distinctly marked in his own mind, and though every sentence he utters may be intelligible, the sermon, if the method is studiously *concealed*, will have only the aspect and effect of a smooth essay. He who aims to save rather than amuse his hearers, will not scruple to interrupt the polished flow of his composition, by dividing it into separate heads. Not that these should, of course, be named numerically at the opening of the sermon. It is not always best that so formal a distribution, by first, second, third &c. should announce the *main* heads, beforehand ; and seldom can this be properly done with the *subordinate* ones. In regard to these latter, the speaker as he passes on, may, if he chooses to omit the numerical distribution, mark them sufficiently by *pauses*, by *antithetic distinction of words*, by change of *quantity* and *pitch of voice*, or by simple *emphasis*.\*

Doctor Doddridge advises that more prominence still shall be given to divisions, by the manner of *announcing* them. Thus his own practice was, to mention the general heads *twice*, beforehand. At the opening of each head, if it was to have subdivisions, he announced these beforehand ; and in the conclusion, he briefly recapitulated all his topics, principal and subordinate. So rigid exactness, as a universal habit of a preacher, seems to me undesirable ; yet he will be compelled to study lucid arrangement, by a frequent resort to such a practice.

Among the *advantages* of an obvious method, I remark that *perspicuity* is promoted by it. The understanding is a faculty that delights in order. It contemplates with ease and pleasure,

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\* Jay's Family Discourses, furnish a good pattern for short subdivisions.

things that are placed before it in the light of a just arrangement. Hence Horace properly calls such arrangement, "lucidus ordo."—Hence again,

*Beauty* is promoted by order. Aside from those laws of mind, agreeably to which method facilitates our perception of relations among things; according to our principles of emotion, good taste is disgusted with confusion. A fine library, promiscuously jumbled together, without regard to connexion of volumes, or distinct works, would offend the eye just in proportion to the intrinsic worth, or the elegant appearance of the several books. The same emotion of incongruity is excited by *thoughts* or *expressions*, however brilliant, which have no connexion.

*Brevity* is promoted by order. The poet above alluded to says—"This will be the excellence and beauty of method, that it will enable the writer just now to say, what just now ought to be said, and to omit every thing else." He who *classes* his thoughts on a subject, will see what to use, and what to refuse, among the general mass of matter related to that subject. Besides, confusion of thought leads to repetition; and repetition leads to undue length.

*Energy* is prompted by order; in two ways; the first is by *concentration*. The power of a discourse to impress the mind, depends not on the separate impulse of its parts, but on the combined effect of the whole. And often an argument derives all its strength from its standing in proper connexion with *other* arguments. The united strength of five men, might easily raise a weight, which the separate efforts of the five, would be unable to stir. The regular phalanx, disposed in order of battle, so that each individual may support the whole line, is irresistible in its outset. But the undisciplined rabble is harmless in its movements, if not contemptible.

The other way in which order contributes to strength, is by promoting *vivacity*. Give to the traveller, who is to pass through a strange country, a chart, pointing out beforehand his road, with the chief objects that will demand his attention, and he pursues his way with increased spirit. Even the languor of a single

day's journey is relieved by his being able often to ascertain what progress he has made, and what is the distance to the next stage. So *division* relieves heaviness in a discourse. Quintilian supposes his orator to say, "I will tell you what facts occurred before this transaction, what at the time, and what afterwards." "This" he says "will seem to be three short narrations, instead of a single long one. The hearer is refreshed as he perceives the end of the last division, and prepares himself, as to a new beginning." The advantage of such transitions, Cicero well understood. "Hitherto Cæsar," said he, having advanced one stage in his defence, "Hitherto Cæsar, Ligarius appears to be free from fault," and then commences another branch of his argument. Finally,

*Memory* is assisted by order. It were easy to show how important this consideration is to the preacher himself, if he wishes to be able, in any case, to address his fellow men, without the most servile dependence on a manuscript. But I refer especially to the memory of hearers. What is memory? It is that reflex operation of the mind, by which it recalls its past thoughts. The capacity of doing this, in a given case, other things being equal, depends on the strength of original impressions, and the circumstances which facilitate the voluntary *repetition* of those impressions. A succession of ideas must be understood, before it can be remembered; and perspicuous method is the vivid light, by which the mind clearly perceives, and deeply feels what is presented before it. But as few original impressions are so deeply imprinted, as to fix themselves in the adult mind, without *repetition*, the recollection of its thoughts depends much on its power to *renew* them, at pleasure. And this again depends on the associations by which they are connected. For example; suppose you were to enter, for the first time, a city with parallel streets, in one direction, marked according to the ordinals, first, second, third; and the intersecting, parallel streets marked with the names of the United States, in their usual order. How easily would you remember the plan of this city, compared with that of another, where the streets are laid out at



random, are crooked, irregular, and designated perhaps, by names which you never heard before. Suppose you were introduced to ten strangers, who should keep their seats in the same order, till you had recalled a few times the name of each, successively. With how much more ease could you recollect them, than if they had been, all this time, passing about the room. The reason why *familiar* things are not forgotten is, that frequent *recurrence* stamps impression. The importance of method to memory, therefore, as an associating principle, lies chiefly in the fact, that method is the medium of spontaneous and instantaneous reflection. The incidents in the story of Joseph, for example, are so connected, that one reading fixes them in the memory of even a child. But that must be a miraculous memory, which could repeat, in the same manner, the genealogical lists of names in the Chronicles.

Witherspoon says, “Suppose I desire a person going to a city, to do several things for me ; as to deliver a letter to one man ; to visit a friend of mine, and bring me notice how he is ; to buy a book for me ; and see whether any ship is to sail for Britain soon.—It is very possible he may remember some of them, and forget the others. But if I desire him to buy me a dozen of silver spoons, to carry them to an engraver, that my name may be put on them, and to procure a case for them ;—if he remembers one article, it is likely he will remember all.”

In view of the foregoing illustrations, I will only add that the importance of method, by which I mean *obvious* method, in a sermon, is so unquestionable, that to affirm it, is only saying in other words, that the sermon of which the hearers *remember nothing*, is useless. The principle involved, in this case, may be tried by one simple, practical test. The custom of taking notes of sermons, as they are delivered, was common in the ancient church, and to some extent it prevails, in many congregations at this day. Suppose then a sermon to be immethodical and incoherent, I do not ask whether an expert stenographer can record every word of it, from the mouth of the speaker ? but can an intelligent hearer commit to paper a brief outline of

the chief thoughts, in such an arrangement, that the review of these will enable him to recollect the substance of the whole sermon? If not, an elementary principle of preaching has been disregarded, in the composition of the sermon.

The appeal may also be made to teachers of schools, and to Christian parents, who are still in the good old practice of calling their children to “repeat sermons;” what sort of sermons are those of which they can give the best account? Without a single exception, the answer will be, those sermons which are constructed on a *simple, obvious* train of thought;—not those in which there is an *occult* method, or *no* method. Let the “teacher of babes,” condescend to be *taught* by babes, in this thing.

## LECTURE X.

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### DIVISION.

WE are to consider next the different KINDS of method. These are, the *textual*, the *topical*, and the *scholastic*.

1. The textual or verbal division is taken from the *words* of the text. An example of this sort we have in the exhortation of the Apostle, "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance &c." where the preacher follows these particulars, in a separate consideration of each *word*, as *faith*, *virtue*, *knowledge*, &c.

2. The topical division drops the *phraseology* of the text, and is grounded on its *sense*, as expressed in some distinct proposition. A sermon of this sort, on the text just mentioned, instead of treating five or six subjects, would illustrate perhaps this one theme, "that all the graces of the gospel are united in the character of the consistent Christian." The words of Christ, to the malefactor on the cross, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise," the textual preacher would divide thus; Consider first the person to whom this promise was made, "Thou," the penitent thief. Secondly the matter of the promise, "shalt be with me in Paradise." Thirdly the time of its accomplishment, "To-day." The topical preacher would perhaps divide thus; "First, the death of believers introduces them immediately, to eternal happiness. Secondly God sometimes prepares men for this happiness in the last moments of life."

On such a text as this,—“What doth the Lord require of

thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God," no better division perhaps can be adopted, than that suggested by the words. But in general, this is the favorite method of only dry and diffuse preachers.

3. The *scholastic* division, consisting of subject, predicate, and copula, may be more or less related to either of the preceding. Suppose the text is, "He that believeth shall be saved;" and the plan of discourse is, to show first,—“What it is to believe: secondly, what is it to be saved; and thirdly the certainty that all who believe shall be saved;” the method would accord with what is probably the prevailing taste of the pulpit. A sermon of an English preacher, published lately, has this text, “The just shall live by faith.” No thought could be more simple than the one here suggested. But the scheme of discourse is the following; “I propose, first, to show the meaning of the term just, as used in the text. Secondly, to explain the nature of faith. And thirdly, in what manner it is that the just may be said to live by faith.”

Another English sermon published 1826, on the text, “The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe;” has this method;

1. What we are to understand by the name of the Lord.
2. What by its being a strong tower.
3. What is the safety it affords.
4. Who are the persons that partake of this safety.

But carry the same taste into a deliberative oration on this topic for example, “the *connexion* between *knowledge and liberty among a people*,” and let the orator announce his method thus; “I shall consider first, what we are to understand by knowledge;—secondly, what by liberty; and thirdly how the one is connected with the other;” and I need not say how tame and puerile this discourse would appear. Yet so strong is the tendency to this artificial structure, in sermonizing, that one can hardly look amiss for examples of it.

*It remains that I mention some RULES, by which divisions should be conducted.* And they should be,

1. *Necessary.* The subject should not only allow, but should

seem to require them. It is the province of a barren invention, as I have before remarked, to give every sermon just so many heads as to correspond with the habits of the preacher, without enquiring whether the topics to be discussed are distinct or not. And where this mechanical taste prevails, it commonly happens that the requisite number of parts is made out, by forcing asunder things, which really belong to the same class ; or rather, by a tedious repetition of the same things, under the most insipid form of variety, a mere difference of numerical distribution.

2. *Divisions should be WELL ARRANGED.* The connexion between them should not only exist in the preacher's mind, but should be apparent to the hearers. The chief *principles* of arrangement, I shall notice briefly. When the different topics will allow it, the relation of *series* should be observed. Each preceding particular should prepare the way for the following, and lead it in, by an easy transition of thought. This principle is violated, when the first head supposes the second to be already understood, by the hearers. In most subjects of argument, the *logical* order is more or less to be observed. Thus when we reason from *causes* to *effects*, or from *effects* to *causes*, or when things are stated according to order of *time*, an obvious relation exists, which determines the proper arrangement. There are indeed some cases in which the order is nearly *arbitrary*. If I were discussing Christian obedience, I might say with Tillotson, that it is *sincere, universal, and constant* ; or I might give these characteristics in a reversed order, without injuring the entire discussion. But if I were considering the fall and restoration of Peter, the two parts of the subject cannot be indifferently transposed. It would be preposterous to describe the *repentance* of this Apostle, before I had described his *sin*.

On the same general principle, it would not be proper to mingle, in a consecutive series, things which belong to different classes. If I were proving the divine origin of the scriptures, and should take my first argument from miracles, my second, from the doctrines of the Bible, and my third, from prophecy, the sources of proof would be unexceptionable, but the arrange-

ment is unskillful ; because the first and third topics belong to external, and the second to internal evidences. Nor is it proper to confound what logicians call the *genus* and the *species*. If I were illustrating the dignity of man from his faculties, it would not be proper to consider first his *reason*, secondly his *will*, thirdly his *soul*, fourthly his *conscience* ; because the third comprehends all the rest. The same incongruity would be seen by a child, if it were carried into *geographical* divisions ; as 1. Maine, 2. New Hampshire, 3. New England, 4. Massachusetts, 5. the county of Essex.

3. *Divisions should be COMPLETE.*

By this I do not mean to say, as a general rule, that all the topics which appertain to a subject should be introduced into a discourse on that subject ; but that when we profess to present it as a *whole*, by its several *parts*, we should exhibit *all* those parts. Thus, if I were describing light, by the distribution of its rays into the principal colors, I must not enumerate red, orange, yellow, green, and then stop ; but must go through the seven. If I were describing Massachusetts, by its counties, I must not stop after naming Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex ;—but must mention the whole. So when an intellectual subject is to be treated according to distinct properties or parts, the distribution should not be partial but complete.

4. *Divisions should, notwithstanding, be FEW.*

A *map* may exhibit geographical lines, mountains, rivers, cities, and a few objects of prominent importance. But attempt to make it embrace minute things, to represent private plantations and dwellings, and you frustrate its design. The eye is disgusted with this multiplicity and confusion of things. So an excessive enumeration of particulars, in a sermon, distracts the minds of the hearers. A preacher of the seventeenth century, having employed thirty divisions in explaining his text, says, “ I shall not shred the words into unnecessary parts ;” and then adds fifty six more divisions to explain the subject. Another, of the same period, whose sermon had already exceeded a hundred and seventy parts, gravely apologized for omitting “ sun-

dry useful points, pitching only on that which comprehended the marrow, and the substance." "When I sit under such preaching," says Dr. Watts, "I fancy myself brought into the valley of Ezekiel's vision; it 'was full of bones, and behold there were very many in the valley, and lo they were *very dry.*'"

5. *Divisions should be CONCISE IN TERMS.* I mean that the words employed should be few; and when it is possible, the chief thought should be expressed in a *single* word. The reason of this rule is, that, in stating a head, we simply inform our hearers what is the point to be discussed; and the more simply and briefly we do this, the more easily is our division understood and remembered. Welwood, on the text, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" has this tedious round of words in his division;

"1. The consideration of the authority of God, under which we are all equally placed, notwithstanding the variety in our conditions, ought to teach us an implicit acquiescence in the duties, and in the lot assigned us.

2. Our obligations to cultivate the blessings we have received, and the consequences of their perversion, are exactly the same, whatever may be our portion of advantages; and,

3. The sentence which shall at last be pronounced on our conduct at the tribunal of God, will have a special relation to the advantages which have been given, or have been denied us; and to the condition in which every individual has served God, or has sinned against him."

Now, if the preacher should repeat this antithetic lumber of phrases and members a thousand times, not one of his hearers would remember it. But there would have been no difficulty, had he said; I shall prove the duty of implicit acquiescence in the allotments of God, first, from his *authority* over us; secondly, from the *blessings* he confers upon us; and thirdly, from our *final account*."

As this principle is of elementary importance, and is constantly violated in the pulpit, I will add, that conciseness in the form

of heads, depends on such a relation of parts, as to dispense with the greatest number of words, by *ellipsis*; and especially to dispense with all ornament or explanation in the head itself.

Take as an illustration the following plan, on the subject of regeneration.—First, I shall consider in what this change consists, or what is its nature. Secondly, show that wherever it takes place, it is produced, not by the efficacy of means, but by the influence of the Holy Spirit. And thirdly, exhibit evidence, that wherever this change is produced by the Holy Spirit, it is followed by the fruits of holiness, or a life of obedience.” See how this drapery of words is dismissed by the aid of *ellipsis*, suspending all the heads on one *connecting term*; thus, “In discussing regeneration, I shall CONSIDER, 1. Its nature. 2. Its Author. And 3. Its fruits.”

Reybaz says,—“A clear division is the handle of a vase; in the taking hold of which, every thing it contains, goes with it. But if it has no handle, its contents are lost to us.” Of this clear division, we have an example in the six particulars of Father Bernard, on the text, “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout;” &c. “*Quis veniat?—Unde?—Quo?—Quando?—Quomodo?—Ad quid?*” On this point I will only add two examples, from a late English preacher; \* so brief and clear, that a hearer might repeat them mentally, several times, without losing more than one sentence of the sermon. The first is on the repentance of Judas, which is shewn to differ from true repentance in four respects; “Its *origin*;—Its *object*;—Its *extent*; and its *result*.” The next is “On the wrath to come,” with five heads.—“It is *divine* wrath;—*Deserved* wrath;—*Unmingled* wrath:—*Accumulated* wrath;—*Eternal* wrath.”



## LECTURE XI.

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### ARGUMENT IN SERMONS.

Having stated some of the general principles which should govern the preacher in the choice and exposition of his text,—the annunciation and the division of his subject; I am now to consider the sources and rules of argument, which fall under the head of *discussion*.

I am aware that many subjects must be introduced into the pulpit, which do not admit of what may strictly be called reasoning. I am aware too, that in the Christian community, an opinion is cherished by many, and is countenanced by the example of some popular preachers, that reasoning is *never* appropriate to the business of the pulpit. The secular orator, it is said, speaks to men of cultivated minds, who can comprehend a train of discussion; but to plain, unlettered men, such as the preacher addresses, every thing in the form of argument is dry, and uninteresting. Certainly plain men are not logicians, but it does not follow that they are incapable of *reasoning*. Even children, in their own department of knowledge, draw conclusions from premises, as well as the philosopher in his. This tendency of the human mind, which appears in its earliest operations, ought to be cherished. Persuasion and action ought to

depend on conviction, and conviction on proof. To substitute declamation for reasoning in the pulpit, is to give the preacher a loose and desultory habit of thinking. In this way too, no stability of religious character can be produced in *hearers*, except through implicit faith, and blind prejudice. The preacher who always declaims, from the supposition that his hearers are unable to comprehend argument, gives the whole influence of his labors, and of his own example, against the use of their reasoning powers, in religion. He takes the direct way to make them *bigots*, on the one hand, or on the other *children*, liable to be "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Wherever such preaching prevails, for a period long enough to produce its genuine influence, that influence is certainly unfavorable to manly discrimination, and strength in Christian attainments. The question, then, needs not to be discussed, whether, in its proper place, argument should be employed in sermons, but in what manner should it be employed?

This will lead us to consider two things, the *sources* of argument, and the *principles on which it is to be conducted*.

My object in these remarks does not require me to confirm or to controvert the doctrines of modern writers on pneumatology and moral philosophy, nor to notice them at all, in addressing those who are already conversant with these writers. My simple business is, to inquire in what way religious truths may best be vindicated and enforced by argument in the pulpit. The laws of intellectual philosophy indeed are directly auxiliary to this end. Even the study of geometry has its important uses to the preacher, as it gives him discipline of thought, and precision of language. Much of the controversy, which has distracted the church, would have been prevented, had theologians employed the same care in selecting and defining their terms, which has rendered mathematical reasoning so perspicuous, and so powerful an instrument of conviction. But is *mathematical* reasoning, as well as *moral*, appropriate to the pulpit? I answer, no. *Demonstration*, in the exact use of the word, belongs only to the science of abstract quantities; and it would be

no more absurd to mingle tropes with terms of geometry, than to apply a mathematical argument to a moral truth. Still, it is a vain triumph in which infidelity has sometimes gloried, that religion is a subject which cannot admit of *certainty*. For in no subject of mere science can our data be more fixed, or our conclusions more unquestionable, than in religion. Many of our first principles, in theology and morals, have as much clearness of intuitive evidence, as mathematical axioms; and we rest in our deductions with all the confidence that attends the most perfect demonstration.

But while it is only *moral* evidence that can be employed in preaching, this evidence arises from different *sources*, each of which is more or less applicable, on different occasions. The immediate end of reasoning is to produce conviction; and this is to be effected, in each particular case, by the power of evidence, that is adapted to that case.

#### SOURCES OF ARGUMENT.

*The first and chief source of that evidence which is to be employed in the pulpit, is the BIBLE.* In respect to an important class of subjects, no *other* evidence can be relied on. What we know for example, respecting the Trinity, the incarnation and atonement of Christ, and justification by faith; we know *only* from the sacred oracles. The simple and only inquiry on such subjects is, what does the Bible teach. And just so far as we rely on the speculations of philosophy, where the truth lies beyond the research of reason, the light of heaven ceases to shine on our path, and we grope in darkness. A want of strict adherence to this obvious principle, has been the prolific occasion of heresy and controversy, in all ages. But while on subjects of this sort, the Bible is the sole standard of faith and of duty, our reason is of course to be employed in ascertaining what the Bible teaches; and also in illustrating and applying to a particular subject, the proof which it furnishes. This is what Paul meant by “reasoning out of the scriptures.” It is so to class

and exhibit our proof, as to show distinctly that God has declared as truth, or enjoined as duty, some particular thing.

Now this mode of reasoning, if I mistake not, as it is too commonly found in sermons, is not sufficiently explicit and direct. In a case where the preacher does not doubt that the ultimate appeal is exclusively to the Bible, often a fastidious delicacy, or a perverted taste, prevents him from giving *prominence* to the divine testimony. He thrusts forward his proof texts, perhaps in a random and unskilful way, without proper regard to their bearing on each other, or the end in view. Or, on the other hand, he may assume the fine rhetorician, and shape the declarations of the Bible into such a subserviency to the easy flow of his own style, that the proof is diluted and humanized in his hands, and leaves no strong impression on the minds of the hearers, that "thus hath the Lord spoken." Illustrations of this great defect might easily be given from the published discourses of many who are called elegant or *polite* preachers. The sermons of Edwards, on the contrary, furnish an excellent example of simple and direct reasoning from the scriptures. His style, indeed, has many faults, and his formality in naming chapter and verse, when texts are cited, is a needless incumbrance, except in strict argument, when some difficult topic is in discussion. But though his habits of thought were those of a metaphysician, and though he never appeared as the critical commentator in the pulpit, he was eminently a *biblical* preacher. So constant was his reference to the scriptures, that it imparted an air of sacredness to his sermons; and his hearers, like the trembling camp of Israel, at the foot of Sinai, had their eye fixed on the authority and majesty of God, and felt a deep impression of awe, as if approaching his judgment seat.

On subjects of pure revelation, where the simple point in argument is, "what has God said in this case;" no interest can be awakened in hearers, so strong or so salutary, as that which arises from scriptural proofs properly conducted. And when the preacher substitutes for these solid materials, the speculations of philosophy, or the embellishments of fancy, the apathy with

which his sermon is commonly regarded by his audience, is but a just rebuke of his self-complacency.

There is however a large class of subjects where the proofs to be adduced in reasoning, are of a *mixed* character, partly from revelation, and partly from other sources.

If I were called to discuss a positive institution of Christianity, as baptism or the Lord's Supper, my first business would be to open the Bible and see what it teaches on this subject. But it might also be proper, and in some circumstances indispensable, for me to adduce collateral evidence from the Fathers, to show that the meaning which I attach to the scriptures, is probably the true one, because it accords with the views of those whose sentiments and practice were derived immediately from the Apostles. So if I were preaching on the obligations of men to worship God, or on the relative duties of parents and children, it would be proper for me to show, that *reason* inculcates these duties, as well as revelation. But then, in cases of this sort, two extremes should be shunned. One is, the tendency of some men by the phraseology they adopt, so to exalt the *reasonableness* of the Bible, as to make the impression that no *implicit* faith is ever required in its declarations;—or, in other words, that the testimony of God does not of *itself* demand our assent, except as confirmed by the testimony of human reason. The other extreme appears in the habit of cautious misgiving, with which some men admit the aid of reason at all, in Christian argumentation, lest they should invalidate, while they professedly confirm the authority of the Bible. But while the declarations of this sacred book are independently and perfectly decisive, where they apply, to enforce them by arguments from reason, where these also are applicable, is to treat them with honor, not with disrespect. This holds true in practical illustration and commentary, as well as proof. For example; I examine the character which Paul gives of the heathen world, in the first chapter of Romans. If I undertake to show that the same character belongs to the heathen *now*, my argument must be taken from human testimony. So if I take a passage,

in which the doctrine of *native depravity* is asserted, concerning an individual, or a community, and I undertake to show that the sacred writer *intended* also to assert the same doctrine, as applicable to *all men*, my argument must proceed according to the laws of biblical interpretation. But if my object is merely to show that this doctrine is *true* in reference to all men, it becomes a question of *fact*, as well as of scripture; and may be proved, like any other point of this sort, by experience and testimony.

I have extended these remarks sufficiently to express my meaning, that the Bible is the grand store-house of argument to the preacher, and yet that he must resort to other kinds of proof.

Among these collateral sources of evidence, *that which I would rank as second to revelation, is CONSCIOUSNESS.* The distinction between this and *conscience* is, that the former respects generally the knowledge which every one has of the existence and operations of his own mind; the latter respects only its *moral* operations. This is a kind of evidence, which commands absolute assent, and that by an immediate appeal to our own bosom. In this way I know that there is a thinking existence within me, that perceives, loves, and hates. I know when I am hungry, or in pain. From this principle, acting with memory, I know that I began to exist; and that I am the same individual as I was yesterday. I know that I deserve blame, if I have done to another what it would have been wrong in him to do towards myself; and that I am innocent, though I may have done him an injury, which proceeded from no wrong intention in me, or which it was not in my power to avoid.

Such elementary principles, from which no one can dissent, are of great value in enforcing many truths and duties of religion;—especially in the removal of perplexities, arising from abstruse speculations. A metaphysician may proceed with a train of reasoning, which looks fair and incontrovertible, till he brings out the conclusion, that men are machines, acting under

a law of physical necessity ; and therefore not accountable for their actions. But any plain man, while he cannot show where the fallacy lies in this reasoning, may boldly pronounce the conclusion false. It contradicts his own consciousness. He *knows* that he is *not* a machine, but a voluntary, accountable agent.

The faithful preacher, who presses truth on the conscience, will often find some fastidious objector, or some anxious sinner, resorting to refuges, which a vain philosophy has invented, to escape the charge of personal guilt. There is no way in which the pungent application of divine truth is so likely to be parried, by the self-excusing temper of the human heart, as by some objection predicated on a denial that men possess the powers of moral agency. Such objections may be met with the light of demonstration from the scriptures, and yet they are renewed with unyielding pertinacity. But let the appeal be made at once to the *consciousness* of the hearer, whether he is not a free agent, and his objections are not refuted merely, they are effectually silenced in a moment.

*A third very ample source of evidence, is that to which writers on intellectual philosophy have given the name of COMMON SENSE.*

This relates to things which do not come within the province of consciousness, but which are so plain to every reasonable mind, that they cannot be questioned. For example, propositions such as these ; “It is impossible that a thing should be and not be, at the same time.” “Every effect must have a cause.” “Things which I see do exist,” strike the mind with the clearness of intuition. They are accounted *self-evident*, as not admitting of proof, on the one hand, or of doubt, on the other. While it appertains to the process of reason, to draw conclusions from such premises, it is the province of *common sense* to judge of these conclusions. Should a speculating visionary lay down axioms, from which he should fancy himself to prove, that all the present modes of travelling will become obsolete ; that men will soon navigate the interior of the earth with sails and oars, or traverse the air with wings, any man,

without claiming to be a philosopher, might smile at the conclusion, and on the authority of common sense, pronounce it ridiculous.

Now to show how this sort of evidence may be applied in the pulpit, it is sufficient to show, by an example, how it has been applied. Archbishop Tillotson, in refuting the absurd hypothesis, that the world sprung from chance, proceeds thus; “Will chance fit means to ends, and that in ten thousand instances, and not fail in one? How often might a man, after he had jumbled a set of letters in a bag, fling them out upon the ground, before they would fall into an exact poem?—yea, or so much as make a good discourse in prose? And may not a little book be as easily made, as this great volume of the world? How long might one sprinkle colours upon canvass, with a careless hand, before they would make the exact picture of a man? And is a man easier to be made by chance, than his picture? How long might twenty thousand blind men, who should be sent out from the remote parts of England, wander up and down, before they would all meet upon Salisbury plains, and fall into rank and file, in the exact order of an army? And yet this is much more easy to be imagined, than how the innumerable blind parts of matter, should rendezvous themselves into a world. A man who sees Henry the seventh’s chapel at Westminster, might with as good reason maintain, yea, and much better, considering the vast difference between that little structure and the huge fabric of the world, that it was never contrived or built by any man; but that the stones did by chance grow into those curious figures, into which we see them to have been cut and graven; and that the materials of that building, the stone, mortar, timber, iron, lead, and glass, happily met together, and ranged themselves into that delicate order in which we see them now, so closely compacted, that it must be a very great chance that parts them again. What would the world think of a man that should advance such an opinion as this, and write a book for it? If they would do him right, they ought to look upon him as mad.



But yet he might maintain this opinion, with a little more reason, than any man can have to say, that the world was made by chance, or that the first men grew out of the earth, as plants do now.”\*

Here is no process of mathematical demonstration, to refute the atheistical sentiment, that matter is eternal; and that this world assumed its present order and beauty without the agency of an intelligent Creator. But if such demonstration had been adapted to the subject and the hearers, in this case, who does not feel that it would have been far less convincing than this skilful appeal to common sense? Such an appeal is felt at once, in all its power. Without that steady application of thought, which abstruse reasoning demands, without any effort indeed, even to uncultivated minds, conviction finds its own way to the understanding, like light to the eye. Hence this sort of evidence is peculiarly valuable to the preacher, in repelling sophistry, and in answering objections, that cannot be effectually met in any other way. Such are the cavils with which infidelity has often assailed Christian doctrines, especially as clothed in the obscure terms of scholastic theology. And such are the doubts with which anxious sinners are distressed, in seasons of revival. Every one, who has had experience in the ministry, knows how deeply such perplexities take hold on common minds; and how difficult it is to obviate them in the best manner. For example, the doctrine of *strict imputation of Adam's sin*, as it has been often represented, seems to such minds, and with good reason, to be plainly inconsistent with the principles of just moral government. It is an axiom of common sense, that no one is criminal for an action committed before he was born, or committed, in any case, by another man. Of course, no argument, however specious, can convince a man that he is to be blamed for what Adam did, six thousand years ago, and on the other side of the globe. But tell him that, as one of a fallen race, descended from Adam, he is accountable for his own

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\* Tillotson's Sermons Vol. I. p. 31. See also Vol. II. p. 50.

sins, and he sees nothing unreasonable in the statement. And though the force of prejudice may have led him blindly to say, "I have indeed a sinful heart, but it is one with which I was born, and which my Creator designed me to possess, and therefore it is not my fault;" appeal to his common sense, and he sees how futile is this objection. He knows that he would not allow the weight of a feather to such an apology, from the man who had assaulted his person, or robbed him of his property. He knows that no father excuses a stubborn son, because he has been stubborn from his infancy; and that no court of justice deems a hardened transgressor guiltless, because he has always had an evil heart. The same remarks apply to what divines have called the doctrine of *inability*. Tell impenitent sinners that they have no sort of power to repent, while in the same breath you exhort them to repentance, on pain of eternal misery, and if they have capacity enough to understand your meaning, they pronounce it utterly absurd. Give them what you call conclusive arguments, from scripture, and from metaphysics; they may be confounded perhaps, but not convinced. And why should it be strange if they feel indignant, when gravely addressed, on the most weighty of all subjects, in a strain that would be mockery and nonsense, if applied to any human concern besides religion?

## LECTURE XII.

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### ARGUMENT IN SERMONS.

*There is a fourth source of evidence, namely, the EVIDENCE OF FACTS, which is more or less mingled with all the foregoing; and which includes also the evidence of experience, testimony, and authority.* It is a *general law* of both the material and intellectual worlds, that *like causes will produce like effects*, or that the future will resemble the past. This law is the sole basis of physical and of political science. Hence we know that, in all ages and countries, rivers will flow downwards, fire will burn, and poison destroy. And hence we know too, how *men* will feel and act under given circumstances. If there were no uniformity in the operations of mind, no system of government could be framed for any community; nor could social relations exist, in any neighborhood or family. The same regularity resulting from settled principles in the divine government, and in human agency, gives a fixed character to what we call Christian experience. On this ground we may expect with certainty, wherever we find unsanctified, human beings, to find them with selfish and depraved hearts; and wherever we find those who are sanctified by divine grace, to see them possess affections essentially the same as have distinguished pious men, in all ages.

I need not spend time in applying these principles to the work of the preacher. He must be very unskilful not to know, that some parts of almost every subject, to be discussed in the pulpit, admit of confirmation or illustration from *facts*; and that this kind of reasoning, where it does apply, is precisely that by which men choose to be addressed, and are predisposed to be convinced. Other things being equal he will have most power over an assembly, whose mind is best stored with facts, especially scriptural facts, and who best knows how to apply them with effect.

*Testimony*, as I have already said, in treating of scriptural evidence, is a kind of proof that must be employed in sermons; but it is liable to great abuse. The extent to which some have carried appeals to ecclesiastical history, on certain points of sectarian controversy, such as the subject and mode of baptism, is certainly undesirable, if not totally inadmissible in the pulpit.

In these remarks I include also, the evidence of *authority*. The spirit of this age indeed, is not more disposed to bow to popes and fathers, than to the mystic triling of scholastic theology, or the categories of Aristotle. The law of conscience will never again be sought in canons of the church; nor the rule of faith, in the opinions of men, who, whatever else they have left doubtful, have demonstrated their own fallibility, by often contradicting one another, and themselves, and the Bible.

The *abuse* of authority in reasoning, is strikingly exhibited in the "*Oral Law*," or *traditions* of the Jews, which they supposed God to have delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, though never committed to writing. By these traditions, a great many ceremonies and authoritative maxims, were handed down, as of sacred obligation, among that people, though some of them directly contradicted the written Law of God; and were condemned with great severity by Christ, in his sermon on the Mount. Hence when the Pharisees complainingly said to Christ, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the Elders?" he replied in the solemn rebuke, "Why do ye transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

The Romish church too, as every reader of history knows, has for ages framed to itself a set of traditions, by which the authority of the fathers is avowedly made to supersede that of the Bible.

But there is another extreme. The blindest bigotry is not more blind, than the narrow and boastful prejudice, that discards all respect for received opinions. This is to discard experience and testimony, and indeed all the laws of evidence, by which human opinions are governed. Say what he will of authority, no man is free from its influence, or *can* be without renouncing his reason. It has its weight even in matters of science. Who would not presume a demonstration to be correct, if he knew that it had often passed under the scrutiny and sanction of Newton, and had been re-examined and pronounced faultless by the ablest mathematicians to this day? Who does not feel, in any case, more reliance on the judgment of a wise man, than on that of one who is ignorant or weak? The power over the minds of others, ascribed to the Nestor of Homer, and the Mentor of Telemachus, is a just character in poetry, solely because it accords with philosophy and experience. Precisely for the same reason, a general coincidence of sentiment, especially among wise men, if that coincidence is not explained away by the force of some obvious, countervailing principle, always furnishes a high, presumptive evidence that the thing believed is true.

Preserving to every one then, the right of independent judgment, that judgment still to be rational, must accord with *evidence*; including the evidence of facts, as it appears in experience and testimony; otherwise no faith can be reposed in history, and no step can be taken in the common affairs of life. He who would be more independent than this, must pass for the same sort of philosopher with him who should act on the persuasion that iron will swim in water, or that a man may leap from a precipice without harm.

The practical bearing of my remarks on authority, is briefly this. If the disciples of the *Koran*, should generally affirm some particular doctrine to be taught in that book, though I had

never seen it, I should believe the fact without examination, unless I could see some strong reason for calling it in question. On the same ground, a reasonable man, though he had never seen the *Bible*, would believe that it teaches a doctrine, which nine tenths of those who have read it, agree in affirming that it does teach. The dissent of the other tenth would not hinder this conclusion, especially if he could explain this dissent by the influence of some strong and obvious prejudice. The established laws of evidence, for example, would require such a man to believe that the *Bible* teaches the *Unity of God*, and forbids malice and murder. And on the same evidence he must be satisfied that it teaches the *atonement of Christ*, and the kindred *doctrines of grace*. Accordingly I have said in a former lecture, that the coincidence which we see in the confessions of faith, drawn up by evangelical churches, in different ages and countries, and professedly grounded on the *Bible*, would be an absolute miracle, on the supposition that these doctrines are not contained in the *Bible*. Hence it has always been deemed good collateral reasoning in support of any doctrinal opinion, to show that this opinion has been entertained by the greatest and best men.

In sermons, I know this sort of reasoning is but of secondary importance; but there are occasions when it may be applied with great effect.

#### RULES OF ARGUMENT.

We proceed to consider the principles, according to which, reasoning in the pulpit should be conducted.

No one will understand me to intimate, that any artificial process can confer on a man the power of carrying conviction to the minds of others. This must depend primarily, on the strength of his invention; the clearness of his perceptions; the accuracy with which he combines things that are analogous, and separates things that differ; and the precision and energy with which he employs language, to express his thoughts.

Technical logic can no more make a reasoner, than technical rhetoric can make an orator. Still, both reasoning and elocution, must conform to those principles, which genius has prescribed to its own operations. These principles are substantially the same in sermons, as in any other department of public speaking. In conformity with this remark, I here mention the fact, that an eminent lawyer and judge of my acquaintance, whose son, after a public education, was destined to the bar, requested a preacher, who possessed great strength in argumentation, to take charge of the young gentleman, and endeavor to teach him that skill in reasoning, by which the preacher himself was distinguished.

As argument in sermons must depend primarily on evidence drawn from revelation, we may begin with the principles to be observed, in regard to proofs derived from the Bible. Important as these are to every preacher, yet to those who have enjoyed the advantages of this Seminary, they may be suggested in the form of hints, rather than of extended discussion.

FIRST; THE UNPERVERTED MEANING OF THE BIBLE, *must clearly support the point to be proved.*

All protestants unhesitatingly admit, that our faith is to be conformed to the Bible, and not the Bible to our faith. Yet this plain principle is often violated, even among good men, by unwarrantable liberties of straining the word of God, into a sense corresponding with opinions which have been formed independent of its authority. In all cases, some allowance is to be made for innocent mistake, resulting from the imperfection of human knowledge. The heedless darings of ignorance and empiricism, in interpreting the Bible, must not be encouraged by any indulgence of our charity on the one hand, and on the other, will not be restrained by any severities of our animadversion. But beyond this, there lies a fault on men of piety, and conscience, and learning, which ought to be, and may be corrected. Such a man is not warranted, carelessly and without examination, to adduce among his unquestionable proofs, a text of doubtful import,

barely because some have classed it in the same manner. Nor may he do this because he is aware that his hearers will receive it as proof. Nor should he of design, give to a doubtful passage, a greater weight of evidence on other minds, than it really has on his own. All deliberate straining and wire-drawing of texts, to make them fit our argument, besides being consistent neither with honesty nor reverence for the scriptures, is adapted to awaken suspicion, and to injure the cause it is designed to promote. It is a kind of sacrilege that involves its own punishment. The eagle in the fable, that stole consecrated flesh from the altar, though it was to feed her young, carried home with the flesh a coal of fire, that consumed her own nest. I need not dwell on the endless mischiefs, which the vital interests of truth have sustained, from the unwarrantable liberties of allegorizing interpreters, who make no scruple to find any sense in a passage which suits their purpose, though it be one never intended by the Holy Ghost. It is a maxim worthy of being repeated here, “The *meaning* of the Bible is the Bible.” The foregoing remarks apply to the reprehensible practice of throwing together in a careless or designed amalgamation, different passages, dis severed from their connexion, and often from their primary signification; while the professed object is to exhibit *proof* of something, from the word of God.

Augustine says,—“Non valet,—hæc ego dico, hæc tu dicis, hæc ille dicit;—sed hæc dicit Dominus.” The loose manner, in which the testimony of the Bible is often introduced into sermons, may be owing in some cases, to the very imperfect acquaintance of the preacher with its sacred contents. This consideration led Matthew Henry to say to young ministers; “Especially, make the Bible your study. There is no knowledge which I am more desirous to increase in, than that. Men get wisdom by books, but wisdom towards God is to be gotten out of God’s book; and that by *digging*. Most men do but walk over the surface of it, and pick up here and there a flower. Few dig into it. Read other books, to help you to understand *that* book. Fetch your prayers and sermons from thence.



The volume of inspiration is a full fountain, always overflowing, and hath always something new.”\*

But where there is no perversion of *sense*, the strength of our reasoning from the scriptures may be injured by bad management. We may adopt the dull practice of accumulating quotations from the Bible, to fill up the time, and supply the lack of matter. There is a trite and heavy way of doing this, which is the opposite extreme to that studied elegance of manner, before mentioned, that strips a text of half its meaning, by the drapery thrown around it. On a subject so plainly revealed as to preclude all doubt, such as the holiness of God, it may still be proper to adduce scriptural declarations for the sake of *impression*; but it were absurd in such a case, to cite fifty passages. On the contrary, in proving a controverted point, though *one* clear declaration of the Bible, is decisive in reality, it is not commonly so convincing, in practical effect, as a greater number. But in cases of strict argument, on a disputed subject, a bare *citation* of texts is not sufficient, without more or less of commentary, to show how they apply to the case in hand. For example, in proving the entire and universal depravity of men, it is directly to the purpose to quote Paul’s language in the third chapter of Romans. But the force of this passage is so much increased, by looking at the 14th and 53d Psalms, to which it refers, and at some of the terms employed, that a few pertinent remarks on the connexion, and on the language of the Apostle, may give it double weight in the minds of the hearers. A strong proof of the same doctrine of depravity, is furnished by the words of John, “He that loveth is born of God.” But among common hearers, not one in ten will see the full force of this passage, as applicable to this subject, unless, besides repeating it, you show how it does apply. I scarcely need say, however, that the explanatory remarks which I recommend, should seldom be of the critical and philological cast; at least they

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\* Matthew Henry’s Life.

should never depend on distinctions too nice for the apprehension of common minds.

One more suggestion may be necessary, on the management of scriptural argument ; it respects cases in which the proof lies, not on the face of one text or more, but is made out by comparison and induction. The duty of *daily devotion in families*, is an instance. We cannot cite chapter and verse where this is expressly commanded ; and yet the obligation is so clearly deduced from the general current of the Bible, as to justify this strong declaration of Tillotson ; “The principal part of family religion is prayer, every morning and evening, and reading some portion of scripture. And this is so necessary to keep alive a sense of God and religion, in the minds of men, that where it is neglected, I do not see how any family can in reason be esteemed a family of Christians, or indeed have any religion at all.”

*A SECOND general rule, which applies to arguments, drawn from whatever source, is, that in reasoning, we should take into account, the INFLUENCE OF PASSION AND PREJUDICE ON BELIEF.* The weight of evidence, in producing conviction, is relative, according to the scales in which it is weighed. That may be light as a feather, in the estimation of one man, which has the power of demonstration to another. Without attempting here to analyze the reasons of a fact so wonderful, and yet so unquestionable, no man whose business it is to urge the truth on others, should forget that the affections and habits have a strong ascendancy over the judgment. Solomon had his eye on this principle, when he represented the slothful man as saying—“There is a lion in the way,—I shall be slain in the streets.” And Shakspeare, the philosopher of poets, whose knowledge of men seems next to inspiration, thus describes the partiality with which worldly favor regards the same action, in different circumstances ;

—————“Plate sin with gold,  
“And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks ;  
Arm it in rags, a pigmy’s straw doth pierce it.”

Prejudice is a complex term, by which we designate the state of a man's mind, which is unfavorable to conviction, arising from interest, habit, previous opinion, pride, or other passions. We never trust the judgment of any one in his own cause, or in that of a near friend.\* Urge the timid man to an act of courage, or the proud man to an act of condescension, or the covetous man to an act of generosity, and his *heart* will furnish an answer to all your arguments. Or if you carry the point with him by assault, the victory is but momentary ;—the next day, he could defy your reasoning, according to the adage ;

“ Convince a man against his will,  
He's of the same opinion still.”

The application of these principles, to the work of the preacher, is easy. It is not enough, in any case, that his proof is good ; it must be adapted to circumstances ; to the time, and the state of the hearers. If they are *already settled in an opinion*, which it is his object to overthrow ; especially, if that opinion is fortified by ignorance, or interest, or education, or party spirit, he must proceed with caution and wisdom. Such a case calls not for the bold onset, the language of denunciation, or severity, or even for great earnestness, particularly at the commencement. These bar the door, that would still be left open to a more discreet and gentle approach. There are subjects on which we may *know*, that our hearers are strongly prejudiced against the truth. In discussing these, there are special advantages in the *analytic* method, by which the point to be proved, is concealed at first ; certain undeniable principles are made prominent ; the assent to these, step by step, is rendered unavoidable ; till the result we wish to establish comes out with a clearness of evidence, which cannot be questioned. These

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\* “ Quod volumus, facile credimus.”

hints I know are capable only of a limited application ; but for want of judgment, in adapting ourselves to circumstances, the best talents may be employed in a fruitless effort. Power, I repeat, is relative. A child may undermine a rock, which no giant could heave from its base.

## LECTURE XIII.

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### RULES OF ARGUMENT.

A THIRD rule respecting arguments is, that they be SIMPLE, NOT COMPLICATED AND REFINED.

I refer not here to abstract terms, nor to dark construction of sentences, nor to *style* in any respect, but to *sentiment*. Systematic thinking implies a mental labor to which most men are little accustomed. We cannot expect that they will follow a train of argument, derived from such sources, and consisting of so many parts, as to demand a discriminating and close attention, for any long time. Hence the *cumulative* form of argument, when so conducted that the train of thought is complex, and so that the hearer must fail of reaching our conclusion, if he lose a single step of our process, is too refined for common understandings.

To this reluctance, and this incapacity to think intensely, must be ascribed, in some degree at least, that general feeling of dissatisfaction, excited by what is called *metaphysical* discussion, in sermons. To some extent doubtless this is a *mere prejudice*, very improperly encouraged by those preachers, whose compliant practice seems to allow, that no subject befits the pulpit, which requires *thinking* from themselves or their hearers. This would set aside the most important doctrines of revelation.

In the indefinite reproaches cast on metaphysics, a very plain distinction seems to be forgotten. In one respect or more, a truth may be incomprehensible, and yet the *proof that it is a truth* be perfectly *plain*. For example ;—that God is eternal, —that he created the world,—that man acts under divine influence, and yet is free and accountable—that a sinner, to be qualified for heaven, must be renewed by the Holy Ghost, are points that I can prove at once from the Bible ; and every child can understand the proof, though the subjects are in themselves deep and mysterious. So far, I am on plain ground. But if I undertake to *explain* the eternity of God, or to tell *how* matter could be created or modified by a spirit, or *how* the will of man, though free, is controlled by motives, or *how* the Holy Ghost operates in renewing the heart, my reasoning must be obscure and useless, because I attempt to go beyond the province of argument.

Now while it is clear to me, that the preacher should be conversant with the science of metaphysics, so far as to understand the powers of the human mind, and the principles of logical analysis, it is equally clear, that this kind of knowledge, as well as every other, should be under the guidance of good sense in the pulpit. He who engages in the ministry, with the weak ambition of being reputed a profound thinker, will probably acquire the habit of choosing abstruse subjects for his sermons, or of rendering plain ones abstruse. The love of paradox, that controverts first principles, and delights to puzzle, rather than instruct, is as far from the true spirit of the pulpit, as the vamping of declamation, or the raving of fanaticism. Speculation may be called instructive preaching ; but whom does it instruct ? and in what ? It cannot build men up in the most holy faith. It cannot interest them, till the mind is new-modelled. A man of distinguished common sense said ; “ I honor metaphysicians, logicians, critics,—in their places. But I dare not tell most academical, logical, frigid men, how little I account of their opinion, concerning the true method of preaching to the popular

ear. They are often great men, first-rate men, in their class and sphere, but it is not their sphere to manage the world."

It comes directly within the design of this head, to compare the *abstract* and *dialectical* kind of reasoning, with the *analogical* and *rhetorical*. On this subject, however, at which I have repeatedly glanced already, there is room here but for a few additional remarks.

How then do men spontaneously think and reason, on common subjects? In the abstract mode? Not at all. From the constitution of man, the language, written or spoken, by which he expresses his feelings, is primarily a sort of *painting*. It is a *representation* of emotions, arising within himself, or suggested from the external world. Hence, every language, in its infancy, is necessarily a species of *poetry*. Not rhyme nor metre, which are only artificial and circumstantial appendages of poetry; but poetry in *essence*, that is, *imagery* and *metaphor*. To the mere philologist, as well as to the man of refined taste, it would be a subject of curious interest, should he ascertain to what extent, language is originally formed, by figures taken from objects of *sight*. But the *ear*, and the other senses, are made auxiliary to this mode of conception;—thus we say, "Conscience will *speak* to the guilty in accents of thunder." When we compare *rage* to a *storm*, and *benevolence* to the gentle *zephyr*, we speak a language perfectly simple and significant, and much more energetic, than when we employ mere *words*, which are totally unmeaning, except as arbitrary signs. In this manner we transfer the attributes of mind to matter, or of matter to mind;—we speak of a *broken heart*,—*a load of sorrow*, a *proud monument*. Does any one doubt the utility of employing, in the service of God, this language, which is only a mode of analogical reasoning? Let him tell why God has made men so, that they speak and feel this language, rather than any other. Let him tell why God himself speaks and reasons in this manner, in the Bible. The parable of the sower,—of the barren fig tree,—of the wise and the foolish virgins,—to name no more examples, are beautiful and powerful specimens of ana-

logical reasoning. The preacher then, will generally succeed best in discussion, whose arguments are arrows, pointed with truth, and sped to their mark by a lively and fervid illustration. But I cannot enlarge on the advantages of the *rhetorical*, over the *abstract* mode of reasoning.

*A FOURTH rule is, that arguments should not be TOO MANY.*

In probable reasoning it is indeed true, as Reid has said, that we must rely upon the combined force of different arguments, which lead to the same conclusion. Such evidence may be compared to a rope, made up of many slender filaments, twisted together. The rope has strength to bear the stress, though no one of the filaments would be sufficient for this purpose. But the analogy holds only to a certain extent, beyond which the parts added to argument produce weakness. The maxims of ancient criticism, “*Ne quid nimis;*” and “*Omne supervacuum pleno de pectore manat,*”—are founded in good sense. A plain hearer, who listens to a rapid succession of various proofs, especially if they are novel and incongruous, is much in the condition of a rustic stranger, who is hurried through the streets of a crowded city, where a thousand objects strike his eye, not one of which leaves any distinct and permanent impression on his mind. Or to change the illustration, the preacher often needs the same caution which was given to the Hebrew Captain, when going with a motley assemblage of soldiers to attack Midian and Amalek, “*The people are too many.*” Cicero said, “*Arguments should be weighed, rather than numbered.*” It is certain that the preacher has misjudged, as to the number of his topics, or as to the proper treatment of them, when the sermon he delivers, is long enough for two.

*A FIFTH rule is, that the ORDER OF ARGUMENTS SHOULD BE SUCH AS TO GIVE THEM THE GREATEST EFFECT.*

The principle of arrangement, by which the rhetorical art, like the military, assigns the first rank to the beginning, and the second to the close, demands so much regard at least, as to keep us from attenuating our concluding topics, till they become feeble and tedious. In some respects too, the order of argu-



ments in sermons, must be influenced by the *sources* whence they are drawn. Our strongest proof in general is taken from the Bible ; but when this is mingled with a series of other proofs, there is a valid objection to placing it first. I know it is common in preaching, to prove a point from the word of God and then add arguments from experience, or consciousness, or some other source. But to my mind there is at least an apparent disrespect to the declarations of God, when we adduce these as proof of a point, and then proceed, by arguments of a different kind, to corroborate this proof, as though it were not of itself decisive. In general, when such arguments are independent of scriptural authority, they should be arranged not after but before it. When they are adduced to *answer objections* against the scriptural proof, or to render its meaning more clear and impressive, they must of course *follow* it in order.

There are many cases in which prejudice and waywardness give only a reserved, doubting assent to proof from the Bible. For example ; suppose you have established, by an ample list of texts, the doctrine of God's *eternal purposes*. At the close of this proof, you may easily conceive the mind of some hearer, to be in a state so skeptical, as virtually if not avowedly to reject the Bible, rather than admit this doctrine. It is proper then to go on, and show this hearer, that, even in a step, so desperate, he can find no relief, unless he will reject *reason* too ; for that the doctrine of eternal purposes belongs to natural, as well as revealed religion ;—being inseparable from the acknowledgement of an intelligent, and immutable God ; and, therefore, that it can be denied only by an Atheist.

So, if the proposition to be proved is, “ that men are accountable for their religious opinions,”—direct testimony from the Bible may properly take the lead in your argument ; but because this testimony is received with only a hesitating assent, by men of lax speculations, these men should be made to see that experience and common sense, equally with revelation, teach the criminality of essential error, in religious opinion ;

since they most clearly teach, that the *heart* is the moral man, and that *obliquity of heart* perverts the *understanding*.

The amount of my meaning is, that when collateral arguments, are drawn from different sources, and when the subject is such, that proofs from the Bible will be received with a decisive authority, undiminished by the influence of prejudice, to arrange these proofs last in the series, is most consistent with rhetorical order, and with due respect for the sacred oracles.

In some cases we may hesitate between two places, in either of which a particular topic may be introduced. For example; if the proposition I am discussing is, that the *human heart is naturally destitute of holiness*, it is pertinent to introduce among my proofs, the doctrine of *regeneration*; because the necessity of this change implies the previous destitution of holiness. But it is equally proper, and often more so, as to practical effect, to set this topic by, for the close, to be introduced as an *inference*.

In general, when there is any fixed principle of relation running through different topics, such as order of *time*, or of *cause* and *effect*, that order must be observed. Common minds follow a speaker with pleasure, if he leads them in an easy train of thought, so that they see the connexion of things. But if he passes, by fits and leaps, from one point to another, these detached parts of his discourse produce nothing of that concentrated impression, which results from continuous and connected reasoning. These suggestions I need not extend, as they coincide with remarks already made on *unity*, and on *division* in sermons.

The frequent practice of opening a discussion by a set of *negative* considerations, in my opinion is not expedient, except when some disputed truth is to be guarded against mistake. In general, we show sufficiently what a thing is *not*, by showing clearly what it *is*. Still the negative form of argument, at the beginning of a sermon, in particular subjects, is the best way of obviating difficulties. One of the most instructive preachers whom I have known, in discoursing on the text, "Vengeance

is mine &c.," made this his proposition ; " God will punish the wicked." Instead of answering objections at the close of his discussion, in the common way, he met them at the threshold, in three negative particulars, viz. " We must not suppose that God will fail to punish the wicked, either first, on account of his *goodness* ; nor secondly, on account of his having *provided* an *atonement* ; nor thirdly, on account of his *forbearance*. Then he proceeded to prove his proposition " that God will punish the wicked, in two ways, from what God has *said*, and from what he has *done*."

The *antithetic* form of reasoning is attended with difficulties, as it is often carried on in *pairs* of contrasted particulars, through a sermon. This is a task which few are able to sustain. For this reason I think Bishop Taylor's method on the text, " What shall it profit a man" &c., where he makes a general contrast of two parts, the value of the world on one side, and the value of the soul on the other, is decidedly preferable to that of Bourdaloue, on the text, " Great is your reward in heaven,"—where he breaks his contrast into parts, by considering the reward of holiness as better than that of sin,—because the former is *certain*, the latter *precarious* ;—the former *great*, the latter *worthless* ; the former *eternal*, the latter *transitory*.\*

In reasoning from *Authority*, when we quote the views of another, for the confirmation of our own, it should be in his own *words* ; and often the mention of his name, when that is known and respected, gives additional weight. When the subject or length of the quotation gives it importance, the habit of noting author and page, in the margin, may save us trouble afterwards. And let me say in passing, that the careless mode, practised by

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\* When I read or hear a sermon, constructed on such a plan, and consisting of antithetic topics, the pairs of which are exhibited in regular succession, it often reminds me, (if so familiar an illustration, on so grave a subject, may be pardoned,) of a laborer, attempting to manage two wheelbarrows,—but compelled to roll one a short distance, and then go back after the other. The process is so laborious and heavy, when the above course is adopted in preaching, that it requires no small talent and skill, to render it interesting.

some good men, of adopting long passages from books, without reference or notice of any sort, if it can be reconciled with integrity, is very indiscreet. Too often for the credit of the ministry, has this been demonstrated, in posthumous sermons, committed to the press, from a hasty partiality to their deceased authors.

*The sixth and last rule I shall mention is, that we should ENDEAVOR TO AVOID A CONTROVERSIAL STRAIN OF REASONING.*

The same apostolic precept and example, that require us to contend earnestly for essential truths, require us to avoid all disputes that engender strife and mar the spirit of godliness. Points on which good men honestly differ, when discussed in the pulpit, as they sometimes must be, demand special candour and gentleness. And in general it may be said, that a worse habit can hardly be imagined in a preacher, than that of always creating to himself an adversary in the pulpit, and assuming on every subject, the air and spirit of a disputant.

There are *three* ways of refuting objections. The *first*, and when the case admits it, the best, is, to aim only at a full and clear exhibition of the truth. The *next* is, to interweave objections, and answer them indirectly and without formality. The *last* is, to state them in form, and refute them by distinct arguments. When this last course is adopted, it requires the following precautions.

1. State no objections that are too trivial to deserve notice. We may waste our time by refuting what needs no refutation, as well as by proving what needs no proof.

2. If objections are really weighty, never treat them as insignificant. Without evasion, without distortion, state them fairly and fully;—give them all the weight to which they are entitled.

3. Take care that your answers be complete and decisive, so as not to leave the impression, that you have raised an adversary, whom you have not strength to withstand.

4. State no objections in which your hearers are not interested. Though weighty, and capable of complete refutation, if they

are such as are never likely to be known without your help, it is worse than trifling to discuss them. The physician deserves no praise for his skill in devising an antidote for poison, which his own temerity had administered. What preacher would repeat the language of obscene and profane men, with a view to condemn it? No more does Christian propriety allow us to state artful and blasphemous cavils against religion, for the same end. Even when such cavils are decent in manner, they should not be obtruded on common minds, without urgent necessity. Such minds may understand an objection, and remember it, when the force of a reply is not seen, or is forgotten. It is from the learned labors of Christian advocates for the truth, not from their own investigations, that skeptics have

—————“Gleaned their blunted shafts,  
And shot them at the shield of truth again.”

5. Avoid *acrimony*, as both unchristian and unwise. Meet an objector with ingenuousness and kindness. Take no advantage of verbal inadvertence; nor charge on him consequences, as intentionally admitted by him, which he disavows.

6. Never oppose sects by *name*.

## LECTURE XIV.

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### CONCLUSION OF SERMONS.

The close of a regular discourse has been designated by different terms. The ancients called it *peroration*, and required that it should consist of two parts, *recapitulation* and *address to the passions*.

Supposing an argument to have been so conducted that a brief review of its chief parts, will present them in a strong and concentrated light before the hearers, this prepares them to admit an appeal to their feelings. The practicability of such a review as will answer this purpose, depends on the degree of perspicuous arrangement, which has prevailed in the discourse. The admirable skill with which Cicero wrought up his materials, in his defence of Milo, prepared the way for a powerful peroration. And it will not be deemed out of place, for me to refer again to this great pleader, as a pattern of rhetorical method, worthy to be studied by the Christian orator, who wishes his discourse to make a distinct and strong impression on the hearers. But supposing a discourse to have been loose and diffuse, without any lucid order of thought, all attempts at recapitulation must be worse than useless. In the secular oratory of Athens,

where direct address to the passions was forbidden by law, recapitulation was the usual form of conclusion, in which, of course, much skill was employed to give rhetorical effect.

In sacred eloquence, the close of a discourse is sometimes called *application*;—sometimes, *reflections or inferences*; and sometimes, in this country and in Scotland, though not according to the best usage,—it is called *improvement*.\*

Some preachers are in the habit of intermingling practical reflections with the different topics discussed, throughout a sermon, instead of bringing these together at the close. There may be cases in which this is the best course. Claude, in his essay, recommends that some texts should be treated in the way of *continued application*; and gives an example, in a long sermon on the passage,—“Work out your own salvation,” &c. His design is, to give a specimen of that preaching, which is carried on in the strain of direct address. It may perhaps be considered as a *general rule*, that, in proportion as a subject is treated *argumentatively*, and on the *principles of strict unity*, it demands a regular conclusion; and when a series of *independent points*, are discussed, it becomes more proper for the preacher to apply each of these, as he goes on. But if this rule is just, it would seem to follow, that in proportion as the sermon has this miscellaneous character, and admits this running application, it is the less likely, in general, to produce any single and strong impression on the hearers.

As it is proper for us to derive instruction from the example of others, I shall direct your attention to some *faults* in the conclusion of sermons, as they appear, both from the press and the pulpit. These, so far as they demand our present notice, may be included in the *formal* manner, the *desultory*, and the dry.

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\* The principal, authorized English use of to *improve*, is to *make better*. To *make good use of*, is another sense in which it has occasionally been employed here and in Great Britain, for more than a century, and yet it cannot be regarded as classical. This occasional use of the word has been more common in sermons, than in other kinds of writing.

The *formal* conclusion varies, with the vogue of the pulpit, at different periods. It was more customary than it has been at any other time, after the Reformation; when scholastic divisions generally were carried to a great extreme. To what extent this taste prevailed in the English pulpit, may be seen from the sermons of the Puritans, and from Bishop Wilkins' *Ecclesiastes*, a book which was, for a considerable time, regarded as a standard work on preaching. The usual mode of concluding a sermon, was by a series of many heads, called *uses*, subdivided into minor parts. As a specimen of this manner, we may take the eleventh sermon of the pious Flavel, entitled *England's Duty*. After more than sixty heads in the body of this sermon, the application begins with a *use of information*, which is thrown into five *inferences*. Then comes the *use of exhortation*, first to *believers*, including four heads of *counsel*; then to *unbelievers*, including eight minor heads,—the first of these again split into three parts, making twenty-four divisions in the conclusion. A sermon of the same preacher, on the evidences of grace, closes with a use of *information*, containing *nine inferences*; a use of *exhortation* containing *six motives*; a use of *direction* containing *ten rules*; the last of these divided into eight *meditations*; and a use of *examination* with thirteen minor heads. In the last place, the preacher says, "It remains that I shut up all, with a use of *consolation*," which contains five parts, making fifty-six divisions, in the conclusion.

After the restoration of Charles second, the influence of the court being directed in every possible way to discredit puritanism, the fashion of the pulpit was changed in this as in other respects. In the English church, since the time of Jeremy Taylor and Tillotson, the conclusion of sermons has been much less formal, than before. Still, the scholastic manner has been retained by many distinguished preachers of the past age, and the present. The sermon of President Edwards, entitled "Men God's Enemies," has six inferences, under which are sixteen primary and secondary subdivisions. His sermon on "The justice of God in the Damnation of sinners," enters on the appli-



cation with two divisions, the second of which branches into four subdivisions. These four branch out again into thirteen divisions of the third degree of affinity, six of the fourth, two of the fifth, two of the sixth, and two of the seventh,—in all thirty-one. Perhaps no preacher of our day, goes to this extreme. Yet a rigid formality runs through the applications of some men, so that whatever be the subject or occasion, the same round of particulars, in the same phraseology is to be expected.

The *desultory* conclusion, may arise either from *affectation* or *barrenness* in the preacher. In the former case, the fault is commonly the opposite of that just described. A succession of rambling, incoherent remarks, is adopted, from a false taste, which would shun at all events, the imputation of formality. When this loose manner is occasioned by sterility of thought, it is commonly because the preacher, having worked up his materials, and yet feeling it necessary to proceed, falls into a strain of indefinite remark, or exhortation. Whether he does this, from absolute want of matter, or partly from want of method, or both, the attention of intelligent hearers is certainly lost, the moment they perceive him to be merely filling up the time with observations, which have no important relation to each other, or to the subject. Augustine in his precepts on preaching, says, “When it is manifest that the audience understand what is said, the speaker should close his discourse, or pass on to other topics. As that orator awakens interest, who removes obscurity from what is to be made known; so he is tedious, who dilates and repeats things that are known.” An application may be rich, instructive, and powerful in impression though very formal in its parts; as any one may see in the sermons of Edwards. But that vacuity of thought, of which I am speaking, is necessarily void of interest. Be the number or order of parts what they may, call them inferences, reflections, or any other name, if they are of that general cast, that might as well be attached to another subject as to the one in hand, the character of *barrenness* runs through the whole. All amplification, in such a case, is the mere turning over of trite remarks,

which had constituted the body of the sermon. So straitened is this sort of preacher in his resources, that he often makes the same thing stand as an inference, which had before stood as his main proposition, or one of his chief heads.

The *dry* conclusion, as I shall call it for want of a better term, consists not so much in tame and hackneyed thoughts, nor in technical arrangement, as in a naked, inanimate outline of particulars, simply stated perhaps, as results from the subject discussed. These, though they may be just, and such as a warm-hearted, skilful preacher might amplify, so as to produce a vivid impression on the hearers; awaken no lively interest, because they are only *mentioned*, with the same frigid brevity, as his corollaries are stated, by a mathematical lecturer.

We proceed now to consider in what consists the *excellence* of a conclusion; it being understood, as pre-requisite, in all cases, that the subject of discourse be important, and such as admits an interesting application. To succeed in this part of his work, the preacher should,

1. AIM AT PRACTICAL EFFECT. The very institution of the Christian ministry, supposes that the great purpose of revealed religion, is to promote the reformation and salvation of men. In this view, only, is all scripture *profitable*, that "the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to every good work." All that gives value to knowledge, and to correctness of belief, is their tendency to sanctify the heart and life. On this principle Christ proceeded in his preaching. On the same principle, the Apostles proceeded; and by this standard, the worth of every sermon is to be estimated. Just so far as it is adapted to make the hearers feel the power, and cherish the spirit, and obey the precepts of the gospel, it is what a Christian sermon should be. And that sermon which does not reach the hearers as *individuals*, which is not felt to bear distinctly on their ignorance, or error, or moral defects, as *individuals*, answers no good end whatever. But no such effect will be produced unless it is the preacher's *design*, that his sermon *shall* bear in this manner. If he studiously *avoids* making a close applica-

tion of the truth, no close application of it will be made. If he does not *mean* to press the conscience, most certainly he will *not* press the conscience. Paul doubtless intended, when he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," to make just that impression on Felix, which he did make. Peter intended that his hearers on the day of Pentecost, should be "pricked in their hearts?"—Stephen intended that his hearers should be "cut to the heart." And just so any preacher, before he can make his hearers feel deeply, must *intend* to make them feel.

2. **HE SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE HUMAN MIND.** The aid of this knowledge in applying truth, is most important. In the moral world, as well as the physical, like causes produce like effects. We can never calculate with certainty on any end to be attained, unless we know the principles to be operated on, and the means to be applied, for the attainment of that end. But the laws of mind are as settled, as uniform, as easily applied to practical purposes, as the laws of matter. In either case, the principles most important in real life, are not such as demand skill in the abstract, and profound researches of science, but such as are obvious to the eye of common sense. It was great accuracy of judgment, grounded on a thorough knowledge of history, and a careful analysis of intellectual and moral causes, operating at the time,—which enabled a distinguished British statesman of the last century, to foretell, with almost prophetic exactness, the results of the French revolution.

It is according to laws which govern intellectual operations, and only according to these, that we explain the power of one mind to act upon another. Why have modern ages united in a tribute of admiration to the genius of Shakspeare. How is it that in his Julius Cæsar, every man feels the hand of the poet, searching his own bosom? How is it that in Othello, we are alternately melted to tears, thrilled with surprise, and racked with horror? One single thing accounts for this magic power of the dramatist; he had studied the human heart. He knew

infallibly how to direct the movements of his hand; he knew how and when to touch any string, as he intended, and what note it would respond.

Surely the principles on which this power depends, lie equally open to the eye of the *preacher*, as of the *poet*; and if they are important to be applied, where the chief object is *amusement*, how much more so, where the *immortal interests* of men are concerned.

Light, reflected from a mirror, resembles the truth, as exhibited in the Bible. Though that mirror was not made for me in particular, yet if I stand before it, with my eyes open, I see, not a general representation of every thing, but exactly my *own image*. That mirror may be covered, or placed in the dark, so as to reflect nothing. But if it speaks at all, it speaks truth. I must not look at it, if I would not see my own face;—nor, if I dislike the image, may I complain of him who made the mirror, nor of him who placed it before me.

In applying truth to the conscience, however, there is a difference between *personality* and *individuality*. That special designation of men by name, which was practised by the prophets, and Christ, is not proper for any one, possessing no more than the authority or knowledge of an uninspired teacher. Nor is it generally safe, in our preparations for the pulpit, to trust ourselves in a specific *aim at individuals*; since the design, to be effectual, must be quite apparent, and since the motive, though it be good in us, (of which by the way we must take care,) is always liable to suspicion and mistake. But the more completely truth is so exhibited, that *conscience* is compelled to do its own work, in making the application to individuals, the stronger and the better is the impression produced;—just as ten persons, standing before a portrait painting, are said each to feel a deeper interest in it, by supposing that it looks *at himself*. In this case, the preacher may indeed be *charged* with *personality*, like the English Curate, who was complained of, for “preaching *at his hearers*,” because they often hung down their heads, feeling that he had given an exact description of themselves;

whereas he only delivered to them the very same manuscripts which he prepared for another congregation, before he knew that these individuals were in the world. Whatever there may be undesirable in these feelings, I would not willingly be that preacher, who never gives such inquietude to his hearers. If the unhappy temperament of some men is such, that they will angrily interpret every thing, as designedly spoken against them, which is adapted to do them good, the preacher surely is not to appease their folly and sin, by neglecting his own duty.

But besides this general skill in applying truth, by the agency of *conscience*, it is often useful, by a classification of hearers, to make a direct appeal to their hearts. I select one example from the Archbishop of Cambray, whose pungency and fire were so deeply impressive, especially in the close of his sermons. The address is to careless, nominal Christians. “Who are *you*, profane men, who laugh when you see a renewed sinner following Jesus Christ, and stemming the torrent of all his passions? What then, you cannot endure that we should declare ourselves openly for the God who made us? With you it is a weakness, to fear his eternal justice. With you it is folly to live by faith, in hope of eternal life. Who then are you that make game of religion, and of the religious? Do not you believe *any* religion? Go then out of our churches;—go, live without Christ, without hope, without God in the world. Go, where your impious and brutal despair would hurry you. But alas,—you are professed Christians; you have promised to renounce the world and to take up the cross. You have *promised*;—you dare not deny it; you dare not renounce your salvation; you tremble when approaching death shows you the abyss opening under your feet. Miserable, foolish men!—you would have us think you wise, while you treat as fools, those who, hoping for benefits which you pretend not to have renounced, labor to obtain them.”

There is a more specific application still, in which *each* hearer is set *apart*, and feels himself to be addressed in the second person singular, as though no one else were present. I add a

brief example of this, from the French pulpit, rebuking the common presumption on long life. “Make the different orders of men pass before your eyes;—count them one by one, and see what proportion of the whole die before they are thirty years of age. How many die between thirty and forty! How few arrive at fifty! How very small is the number of *old men*! In a city containing a million of souls, there may be *two or three* thousand: three hundred perhaps in one hundred thousand! Now what foolish security is it to presume, at the risk of your salvation, that *yourself* will be among these *few* exceptions? Were one to hazard his fortune on such uncertainty, he would pass for a *mad-man*; his friends, his wife and children, would pity and confine him. And thou, miserable man, dost *thou* hazard thy *soul*, thine eternal happiness on this frivolous hope?” These examples confirm the statement, that to make a direct and powerful application of truth, the preacher must know the human heart.

3. *The preacher should so ARRANGE THE PARTS OF A SERMON, that they may tend to A SINGLE AND COMBINED EFFECT, IN THE CLOSE.* On this point, I have enlarged so much under the head of *unity*, that only a few additional remarks are needed here. It is not enough that we *aim* to make men feel, and that we *understand the principles of their minds*, if we fail to *adapt our discourse* to those principles. The sermon that wants *plan*, will of course want *power in the conclusion*. An important thought may lose more than half its weight, by standing in a wrong *place*, and *wrong connexion*. The effect of extempore address is often frustrated by the fact, that a few prominent things are produced at once, and then are only dilated, and repeated afterwards. With a view to a main design, steadily kept in mind, the skilful preacher will arrange his subject throughout, so that each part shall add strength to the whole.

The *convergent* method, when the subject admits it, is peculiarly adapted to this purpose. Cicero, as I have before observed, when he had a great point to carry, like a general who would break through an opposing line, considered and arranged his means with consummate skill, till at last he brought them

all to bear down on that point with irresistible effect. There is something in this principle of oratory, analogous to the current of a great river. It rises in remote mountains, a mere rill ; then it becomes a rivulet ; then a brook ; then by the accession of tributary streams, it swells, and widens, and deepens in its course, till it rolls on a flood of waters to the ocean. But imagine, if you can, a river *diminishing* in force as it runs, parting off a rivulet on the right hand, and another on the left, till the main channel is dry ; while each branch becomes less and less till it is lost ; and you have a tolerable representation of a sermon, which promises well at first, but diverges into parts, and dwindles as it goes on, till the current of thought is exhausted in a feeble conclusion. Not so, where the powers of the speaker, the weight of the subject, and the coincidence and continuity of argument and motive, bear on an assembly in the best manner. The sermon grows as it proceeds, and carries on the speaker and hearers, with an increasing tide of interest to the last. So much does the skilful preacher know the entire effect of his discourse to depend on the *application*, that instead of filling up this with common place gleanings of thought, the whole performance is adapted to the final impression he wishes to make ; and he is not ready to begin the writing of a sermon, till he has determined how it is to close. In the process of composing indeed, when the inventive powers are sharpened by exercise, he may modify his plan. Some topic, assigned to an earlier head, or some new thought that occurs, may advantageously be set aside, that it may become more prominent in the close.

I will add under this head, that when a sermon is *argumentative*, whether doctrinal or practical, it may often be closed with *inferences*. These should always be scriptural results, from scriptural premises. Neither false deductions, from Christian premises, nor true deductions, from premises not in the Bible deserve any better name than a vain display of ingenuity. But there are several advantages in a conclusion by inferences, when well conducted, and pertinent to the subject. They exhibit

the truths of religion *connectedly*; they often exhibit *disputed* truths, *unexpectedly* and *unwillingly*. Where the premises would have been rejected, had the deduction been foreseen, it comes by surprise, and compels assent. And what is most important, as a grand principle in preaching is, that such inferences make men *active* hearers, and not *passive*, like hortatory addresses.

4. *The success of a conclusion depends much on the WARMTH, WITH WHICH IT APPEALS TO THE HEART.* "To this part," says Quintilian, "The highest powers of address should be reserved. Here if ever, it is proper to open all the fountains of eloquence. Here, if we have succeeded in other parts, we may take possession of our hearers' minds. Having weathered the shallows and breakers, we may spread full sail; and according to the chief design of a peroration, we may give free scope to magnificence in sentiment and language."

To this part of a discourse the best institutes of oratory assign the *pathetic*; on which, however, my limits here allow only a few suggestions. My *first* remark is, that all attempts to move the passions will fail, without *simplicity* in thought and language. The precepts of books on this subject, except a few leading principles, are by far too artificial for the pulpit. The devices by which popular orators of old sought to move their hearers, would be condemned by the taste of this age, as unsuitable in any case, and especially in Christian eloquence. Nor can any *mere study of the passions* enable a man to reach them with success. There is a power in genius, combined with sensibility, to which the throbbings of the heart respond, but which art cannot imitate nor explain.

A *second* remark is, that *not all kinds of emotion, nor even of high emotion*, fall under the head of pathetic. Animation, vehemence, or what is often termed fire, produce strong emotion, but it is of a different sort. Grand and sublime representations awaken sentiments of awe or admiration, and perhaps overwhelm with their majesty. But the pathetic is distinguished by its gentle, insinuating, melting influence, which silently



wins upon the heart, and makes it yield itself to the power that so irresistibly, and yet so delightfully, controls its affections.

A *third* remark is, *the pathetic cannot be protracted*. Strong passion is necessarily short in continuance. "Nothing," says Quintilian, quoting Cicero, "nothing dries up sooner than tears. The auditor shortly becomes weary of weeping, and relapses into tranquillity. We must not let this work grow cold on our hands, but having wrought up the passions, leave them." Sometimes however, the heart may be touched for a moment, at several successive intervals;—while at each time, its sensibilities start into action more readily, as it retains the softening influence of past emotion. Whereas, if the same note is sounded too long at once, feeling flags, and dies away into fatigue.

A *fourth* remark is, that, in all addresses to the passions, *moral painting is indispensable*. The two chief reasons are that the senses are the primary inlet of ideas; and that *remoteness* of objects diminishes their power of impression. Painting annihilates absence and distance, and embodies objects before the eye, as they are seen in life, or on canvass. It thrills the heart, where mere description would leave it cold. From this principle arises the awful interest, often awakened by the delineations of the Bible; such, for example, as the transactions of the last judgment. We see the Judge enthroned,—the retinue of angels, the books open, the heavens passing away,—the dead small and great, standing before God. We forget intervening ages. The scenery is all present;—we feel ourselves encompassed with the dread realities of that occasion.

The painting to the *fancy*, which belongs to pastoral poetry, has little use in the pathetic of the pulpit. Our business is with the *heart*, which abjures amplification, and drapery, and embellishment. The most moving scene of the pulpit, the death of Christ, is often so overdrawn, with pompous decoration, as to chill the hearers with indifference. Yet a skilful pleader will give life to the exhibition of a common murder. You see the assailant spring from his ambush;—his victim calling for help. You see the blow given,—the man falling,—hear his groan,—

see his gushing blood, his convulsive agonies in death. It is lamentable that the power which, in poetry and romance, often seizes the heart with resistless grasp, is so seldom brought to bear on the feelings of men, from the pulpit.

*A fifth remark is, that though high powers of execution in the pathetic are wanting to any preacher, THIS IS NO REASON WHY HE SHOULD BE DULL AND COLD.* The most careless hearers know too well the weight of our business, to be satisfied when we aim no strokes at the heart. The keen sting of conscience they dread, but the thrill of emotion, they certainly prefer, to the listlessness of indifference. The love of excitement is instinctive and universal. Suppose that you lack, what indeed few possess, the power of taking the heart by assault; yet you *must awaken feeling*, especially in the close of your discourse, or you come utterly short of the great end of preaching. A frigid temperament is no excuse in this case. Whose fault is it, that his heart is cold, who speaks on a subject which fills heaven with emotion? He has proved a great doctrine of the gospel to be true, perhaps by clear argument. What then? Shall that doctrine be left on the same footing with a mathematical axiom? Shall the hearers rest in mere assent to its truth, when its *truth* is the very thing that cuts them off from hope and heaven? Look on an assembly of immortal beings, sinking down to death, under an accumulation of unpardoned guilt; think of the unspeakable love and agonies, which procured for them forgiveness; anticipate your meeting with these same hearers, at the judgment; and the certainty that each one of them, who dies impenitent, will be an eternal out-cast from God; and then, if you feel no stirrings of a mighty emotion in your own bosom, where is your compassion for dying men? Where is your love to Christ? Talk not of a piety that can offer *apology* for such a state of heart. Mourn for it rather as your *sin*. Go to *God* with that heart, before you bring it to the pulpit, and beg him to make it what the heart of a minister should be. I know, Gentlemen, from experience, something of the magnitude and the difficulties of the work before you. And

I know too well my own defects, to wish that my example, and not my precepts, should be your guide on this subject. For many years my animal frame has seldom been able to sustain that degree of emotion, which I think is often desirable in the pulpit; and a sense of duty has required me to restrain those feelings, on which the satisfaction and success of a preacher's labors, greatly depend. For whatever is faulty in the share of influence which my official standing and labors may have on you, I expect to give account to God. And I tremble to think that I am called to aid in shaping the character, and the ministrations, of those whose influence may extend around the globe, and must extend, in consequences of awful moment, beyond the grave. With these consequences in full view, let me say to you,—take care of your heart; shun, with unwavering vigilance, whatever tends to deaden your Christian affections; fix your eye on the great ends of preaching; cultivate a deep sense of your dependance on God; and then, in humble reliance on his grace, you will speak,—“in demonstration of the spirit, and with power.”

## LECTURE XV.

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### STYLE OF THE PULPIT.—GENERAL REMARKS.—FAULTS OF STYLE IN SERMONS.—EXCELLENCIES.

N. B. [This Lecture and the following, were written as part of a course of lectures on Style. The more general principles of good writing, as discussed in that course, it is the Author's design to remodel, and to publish hereafter, for the use of young preachers.]

I come now to offer some remarks on the appropriate style of the pulpit. The opinion that the Christian preacher, when he speaks on *religion*, must assume a countenance, a tone, and a style, such as are adapted to no *other* subject, has been greatly prejudicial to the interests of piety.

1. Our *first* inquiry is, how far may the preacher's style be *professional* and *peculiar*. The views which I entertain as to the peculiarity of diction, allowable in sermons, may be expressed under two general remarks.

One is, that religion must have terms, call them *technical* if you please, but terms appropriate to itself. The arts, and the physical sciences require words and phrases, which cannot be used in theology. For the same reason theology must have, to

a certain extent, its own expressions, adapted to its own peculiar subjects. And Christian theology must be distinguished, in this respect, from Mahometan and Pagan systems of religion. If the writers of the New Testament must have been rigidly tied down to classical usage, they could have had no words to express those thoughts which were peculiar to the gospel. Plato and Xenophon had no such thoughts; and the primary, classical import of the words which they employed, could not therefore express the meaning of Paul, on topics peculiar to the style he must use in preaching the gospel. Strike out from the language of the pulpit the words, *sin, holiness, redeemer, atonement, regeneration, grace, covenant, justification, salvation*, and others of similar import, and what would become of the distinctive character of Christianity? The preacher in this case, must either not exhibit the truths of the gospel at all, or exhibit them under all the disadvantages of an endless and needless circumlocution. In either case, his ministrations, whatever literary merit they might possess, would have little tendency to instruct and save his hearers. Before he can submit to the requisitions of a taste so perverted, he must have forgotten the sacred dignity of his office, as an ambassador of Christ.

My other remark is, that, with the above exception, the general character of style in sermons, should be such as is proper, in discussing any elevated and interesting subject. The reasons are obvious. If we would impress religious truth on the hearts of men, it must be done through the medium of the understanding. We must address them, therefore, in language to which they are accustomed. After the example of our Saviour, we should employ words and figures, which accord with the familiar conceptions of our hearers. By this means too, we may avoid any repulsive associations, which would otherwise prevent the access of truth to the mind. If he who speaks on religion, assumes the aspect and tones of sadness, he makes the impression on the minds of the irreligious, that piety is inconsistent with cheerfulness. An effect not less favorable is produced by a correspondent peculiarity of *language*. Besides, a strong and vivid rep-

resentation of any subject, cannot be made, when the terms employed are inappropriate or indefinite.

2. We are prepared, in the next place, to glance at those peculiarities, most common in the style of sermons, which must be accounted *faults*.

*The theological dialect*, as distinguished from what may be called classical style, results in a considerable measure, from a designed imitation of scriptural language. I say *imitation*, for unquestionably direct *quotation* from the Bible, is not only necessary, in adducing proofs from this standard of religious belief and practice, but is required by good taste, for purposes of illustration and impression. Such quotations, if made with judgment, give weight and authority to a sermon. But the defect I am describing, lies in the unskilful amalgamation of sacred with common phraseology. This takes place, sometimes in single words, as *peradventure*, used for *perhaps*; *tribulation* for *affliction* or *distress*; *sensuality* and *carnality*, for *sinful affections*; and *edification*, for *instruction* or *improvement*. So a *phrase* is often employed in a manner which requires a commentary to give it significance in current language; as when licentious conduct is called “chambering and wantonness.”

Sometimes this peculiar cast of style arises from using familiar terms, in an abstract or mystical sense, as *walk* and *conversation*, for *actions* or *deportment*. Sometimes a peculiar combination of words, makes a sort of *spiritual phrase*; as “mind and will of God,”—“a sense of divine things;” and when intensive expression is necessary, “a *realizing* sense of divine things,” is extremely common in the pulpit dialect. In some portions of our country, and at some periods, a great fondness has prevailed for compound words, such as “*God-provoking*, *heaven-offending*, *Christ-despising*, *land-defiling*. Some of these awkward, anglo-ecclesiastical combinations, have struggled hard for a standing in good style, both here and in Great Britain: such as *unspeakableness*, *worldly-mindedness*, *spiritual-mindedness*. Men of correct taste will a thousand times rather dispense with all the advantages of these terms, than mar their

native tongue, by multiplying such unseemly compounds. There is the more need of guarding against such terms, because if they are formed from words which belong to the language, they escape the reproach of barbarism; and therefore may be multiplied without end, if the tendency of writers to these combinations, shall be subject to no control but the dictates of caprice or affectation. The man who has the command of language, may easily find other words, equivalent in sense, or sufficiently so, to substitute for such complex phrases. Instead of *worldly-mindedness*, he may say *attachment to the world*. Instead of *spiritual-mindedness*, a *spirit of devotion*, or a *spirit of habitual piety*.

The same general fault in the preacher's style may be increased, by his *necessary familiarity with theological writers of past times*. The excellent sentiments which these often contain, expressed perhaps in quaint and antiquated phraseology, imperceptibly give a cast to his own diction, resembling, in its influence on other minds, the stiffness and peculiarity which would appear in his *garb*, if it were conformed to the fashion of the sixteenth century.

One more source of the defect I am condemning, deserves to be mentioned; I mean the influence of the *colloquial dialect* on the preacher's style. The daily intercourse with common people, which, as a man, and a minister of religion, he is called to maintain, inclines him to adopt, in his public discourses, the language with which he addresses his hearers, and with which they address each other, in ordinary cases. In this way probably, a class of words, some of which are peculiar to this country, found their way into sermons;—such as *approve*, *missionate*, *gospelize*, *variate*, *happifying*, *bestowment*, *bestrustment*, *engagedness*. These words indeed, are much less frequently seen in written discourses, than certain others of the same description, which are as common in English as in American sermons, such as *preventative*, *profanity*, *requirement*, and *solemnize*, in the sense of *make solemn*.

Having suggested these hints, on the defects of pul-

pit style, I proceed to state some of the chief qualities which it ought to possess. I cannot here advert to general principles, already discussed in my Lectures on Taste and Style. Taking it for granted that perspicuity, strength, and a proper degree of ornament, are essential attributes of all good writing, and therefore never to be neglected by the preacher, I shall consider certain properties of style, which he is under *peculiar* obligations to cultivate.

The *first* of these, which I shall mention, is SIMPLICITY.

This, as I have already observed, is required by the principles of *good taste*. But it is more to my purpose, at present, to show that it is required of the Christian preacher, by the principles of *religion*. He is appointed to instruct men in the way of salvation; to instruct those, many of whom are ignorant. To instruct them in that gospel, of which it was a remarkable characteristic, at its first publication, “that it was preached to the poor.” ‘In this respect our Savior was a perfect pattern,—accommodating his instructions to the weak and illiterate, in distinction from the Jewish teachers, and the heathen philosophers, who delivered their discourses only to a few select disciples.’

The simplicity of language which a preacher should adopt, requires him to choose such *words as are* INTELLIGIBLE to his hearers. I say not that he shall adopt the extravagant principle, sometimes laid down, never to use a word, which is not familiar to every child. This would forbid him to preach at all, on the simplest topics, without such a constant explanation of terms, as would render his discourses tedious and uninteresting, to the greater part of every assembly. But the proper rule of conduct, in this case, lies in a narrow compass.

We should take care then never to use a *hard* word, when a *plain* one would express our meaning. The *sense* to be expressed, is the main point, and language is only the vehicle of communication. The affectation which leads a man to sacrifice the object for which he speaks, to the reputation of being



an erudite or elegant speaker, is altogether beneath the dignity of the sacred office.\*

Who would expect "a teacher of babes," to ransack the resources of etymology, and to speak of the "lapsed state of man," and the "moral adaptation of things," when his proper business is to discuss the great and simple truths of the gospel, in the plainest manner? It is a familiar anecdote of the distinguished Prelate, Archbishop Tillotson, that before he delivered his sermons, he sometimes read them to an illiterate old lady, of good sense, that by the aid of her remarks, he might reduce his style to the level of common capacities.

It was quite another kind of men to whom Eachard referred, with some severity, in his book entitled, "Contempt of the Clergy." "There is," said he, "a sort of divines, who, if they do but happen of an unlucky, hard word all the week, think themselves not careful of their flock, if they lay it not up, and bestow it among them, in their next sermon."

Another caution to be observed is, that *common* words should not be used in an *uncommon*, *abstract*, or *philosophical* sense. "I was well acquainted, says Witherspoon, with a divine many years ago, who began a prayer in his congregation, by addressing Jehovah as the *simplest* of all beings;" which incensed his hearers to such a degree, that they accused him of having spoken blasphemy; whereas the man only meant to say, that God is philosophically simple and uncompounded, altogether different from the grossness and divisibility, or as it is sometimes more learnedly called, the discerptibility of matter." The wresting of a plain word from its common acceptation, to one that is sci-

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\* Witherspoon ridicules this vanity in another profession. "I was acquainted, (says he,) with a physician, who, sitting with a lady in her own house, and being asked by her, 'Doctor, are artichokes good for children?' answered, 'Madam, they are the least flatulent of all the esculent tribe.' 'Indeed, doctor,' said the lady, 'I do not understand a word of what you have said.'"

But if common sense condemns such affectation in a *medical practitioner*, who is entitled to peculiar indulgence for technical phraseology, how much more unbecoming is it in a *minister of salvation*?

entific or abstract, is much more improper in prayer than in preaching; because in a devotional exercise, all explanation of terms, is inadmissible, and all display of erudition, is intolerable. But such a use of words in a *sermon* is altogether improper, except in some case of special necessity, such as will rarely or never occur to a wise preacher.

There is a sort of *metaphysical obscurity* in terms, borrowed from a recent nomenclature of polemic theology, and employed to some extent, in sermons. Preachers who fall into it, cannot, for example, use the plain, scriptural word *heart*, but instead of it say, “generic volition,”—“predominant purpose,” &c. The obscurity of metaphysical periphrasis, is attended with no imaginable advantage, in preaching, unless it be, that it enables the preacher, when hard pressed with difficulties, as he possibly may be, to make his escape by saying to a troublesome inquirer, “you did not understand me.”

There is one more violation of simplicity in the style of sermons, which the preacher should avoid; I mean the *display of extensive reading*. The practice of introducing scraps of quotations from classical authors, if carried beyond very moderate limits, even in literary compositions, is so repulsive to men of taste, that it is much less prevalent now than it was in some former periods. At this day, pedantry in the pulpit, is much more likely to show itself in exotic phrases, in far fetched rhetorical figures, in citing the apothegms of illustrious men, and especially in obtruding upon plain hearers, the names and the opinions of learned writers. To seek the admiration of others by solving difficulties, which we ourselves have created, is an artifice, unworthy of any respectable man. “It is not difficult,” says Usher, “to make *easy* things appear *hard*; but to render *hard* things *easy*, is the *hardest* part of a good orator and preacher.”

But when there is no *affectation* of this sort, the habits of a cultivated mind, may deceive a preacher; and he may, imperceptibly to himself, take it for granted that his language is intelligible to his hearers, because it is so to himself. “The extent

of his knowledge," says a competent judge on this subject, "the quickness of his perception; his ability to grasp a wide, and to unravel a complex subject, to appreciate the force of arguments, and to keep up his attention without fatigue, during a long and arduous investigation; these advantages place him at a distance from uncultivated minds. But when in addition to the difficulties he must encounter from these causes, he speaks a language widely different from that of the mass of his hearers, in its copiousness, its arrangement, its images, and its very terms; he will evidently be in great danger of being generally obscure, and frequently, almost unintelligible to them. The words of Latin and of French derivation in our language, are extremely numerous; and a large proportion of them are completely naturalized, among men of education. They are so perfectly familiar to the ear of a scholar, that he has no conception before he makes the trial, how many of them are never found in the vocabulary of the lower classes. When a young man therefore, accustomed to the language of erudition, laden with school and academic honors, finds himself the pastor of a country congregation, what is his duty? Not indeed to adopt a barbarous and vulgar phraseology;—but, like a missionary lately arrived in a new region, or like an inhabitant of another planet, dropped into a village, he must study the habits of mind, and the language of those among whom he is placed, before he can prosecute his ministerial *labors* with effect."\*

The effort required in this case, well becomes one whose honor it is, for Christ's sake, to be the servant of all. Concerning the simple rhymes, composed by the great reformer, for the sake of the vulgar, it has been well remarked; "For these ballads Luther may receive a greater reward, at the last day, than for whole shelves of learned folios. Vanity may make a man speak and write learnedly; but piety only can prevail on a good scholar to simplify his speech, for the sake of the vulgar.†

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\* Christian Observer.

† Augustine says "Of what value is a golden key, if it will not open what we wish?—and what is the harm of a wooden one, if it will

Such a preacher, though his worth may be overlooked by the undiscerning now, will one day have a name that is above every name, whether it be philosopher, poet, orator, or whatever is most revered among mankind.”\* As examples of simplicity, without vulgarity in the pulpit, I might name Fenelon, Cecil, Bradley, Payson, and perhaps John Robinson.

The *second* quality requisite in the style of Sermons, is **SERIOUSNESS**.

In some departments of oratory, *ridicule* may be employed with propriety, and with great effect. In the hands of the senator or pleader, this instrument often has an invisible edge, when argument is unavailing. But the dignity of the pulpit *rejects* the aid of this weapon. I do not say that satire in sermons is *never* admissible ; but it is always dangerous, and almost always mischievous.

“ It may correct a foible, may chastise  
 The freaks of fashion, regulate the *dress* :  
 But where are its sublimer trophies found ?  
 What vice has it subdued ? whose heart reclaim’d  
 By rigor, or whom laugh’d into reform ?  
 Alas ! Leviathan is not so tam’d :  
 Laugh’d at, he laughs again, and stricken hard,  
 Turns to the stroke his adamantine scales,  
 That fear no discipline of human hands.”

If the graver sort of irony, employed for sober purposes, can seldom be indulged in the pulpit, what shall we say of that unmeaning *levity* and *witticism* of language, which is sometimes heard in sermons ? The preacher trifles in this manner, under the pretence of keeping up the attention of his hearers. But *what* attention does he desire ; and for what *purpose* ? Not the attention of the theatre or the circus : but the attention of immortal beings, to a message from God. Let him not then degrade his office and himself, by a preposterous levity. Surely, when

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accomplish this purpose ?—since all we seek is to obtain access to what is concealed.”

\* Robinson on Claude.

mingled with the most momentous and awful subjects, there is especial reason to say, "of laughter, it is mad, and of mirth, what doeth it."

But seriousness in the pulpit is inconsistent, not merely with sarcasm, and witticism, but with that *affected smartness* of expression, and that exuberance of sparkling embellishment, which betray at once a puerile taste, and a heart unaffected with the great subjects of religion. Bates says, "This is like Nero's lading his galleys from Egypt, with sand for the wrestlers, when Rome was starving for want of corn."

This leads me to notice a *third* excellence in the style of sermons, which is **EARNESTNESS**.

Let me not be understood to recommend that false animation which characterizes every species of artificial eloquence. All that vain parade and pomp of elocution, in which the speaker's effort is to exhibit himself and not his subject, is contemptible in a lawyer; but in a minister of the gospel, it is unpardonable. "Shall those," says Fenelon, "who ought to speak like Apostles, gather up those flowers of rhetoric, which Demosthenes, Manlius and Brutus trampled on? What could we think of a preacher, who should, in the most affected jingle of words, show sinners the divine judgment hanging over their heads, and hell under their feet? There is a decency to be observed, in our language, as in our clothes. A disconsolate widow does not mourn in fringes, ribands, and embroidery. And an Apostolical minister ought not to preach the word of God in a pompous style, full of affected ornaments. The Pagans would not have endured to see even a comedy so ill acted. I love a serious preacher who speaks for my sake, and not for his own; who seeks my salvation, and not his own vain glory. He best deserves to be heard, who uses speech only to clothe his thoughts; and his thoughts only to promote truth and virtue. A man who has a great and active soul, needs never fear the want of expressions. His most ordinary discourses will have exquisite strokes of oratory, which the florid haranguers can never imitate. He is not a slave to words, but closely pursues the truth.

He knows that vehemence is, as it were, the soul of eloquence.”\*

When a prelate inquired of Garrick, why the theatre exhibited so much more eloquence than the pulpit, the actor replied; “We speak of fictions as if they were realities; you speak of realities as if they were fictions.” Let a stammering peasant be put to plead for his life, and he is eloquent. Let a minister of the gospel be deeply impressed with the weight of his business, and *he* will be eloquent. He will make you understand him, for he understands himself. He will make you feel, for he feels himself. The highest order of pulpit eloquence, is nothing but the flame of enlightened piety, united with the flame of genius. When this glows in the bosom, it sanctifies and concentrates all the powers of the mind. It makes even the stripling warrior, “valiant in fight;” and enables him to cut off the head of Goliath, with the sword wrested from his own hand.

Would you know the difference, then, between the pulpit declaimer, and the pulpit orator?—It is this:—the former preaches for himself; the later for God. One seeks the applause of his hearers; the other, their salvation. One displays before them the arts of a fine speaker; the other assails them with the lightning and thunder of truth. One amuses the fancy; the other agitates the conscience; forces open the eyes of the blind; and storms the citadel of the heart.

The style of declamation may, indeed, be perspicuous. But its perspicuity differs as much from that of fervid eloquence, as the transparency of ice, differs from the glowing transparency of melted glass, issuing from the furnace.

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\* Letter to French Academy.

## LECTURE XVI.

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### STYLE OF THE PULPIT.—DIRECTIONS IN FORMING A STYLE.

Skill in writing depends on genius and discipline. Without genius, industry and art can never raise a man's performance above the character of elaborate dulness. Without discipline, the best powers can never be brought to act by any uniform principles, or to any valuable end.

For the benefit of those who are still forming their intellectual habits, expecting to devote all their powers, to the holy and exalted work of preaching the gospel, I shall now offer some practical suggestions as to the attainment of a good style. In doing this, I shall keep in view the principle advanced in my preceding lecture, that the primary purposes of language are the same to a preacher, as to other men. Just like other men, he needs light to see, and air to breathe ; and when he speaks, he needs words, to convey his meaning forcibly, to those whom he addresses. A proper adaptation of his language to the momentous importance of the subjects which he treats, and to the capacity of his hearers, is certainly his duty ; but the elementary principles of a good style, are the same to him, as to other men. The present lecture, like the preceding, assumes these

principles, without repeating the views which I have heretofore expressed. What I shall now attempt is, to give some practical directions for the attainment of a good style.

*The first of these is,—always remember THAT THE BASIS OF A GOOD STYLE IS THOUGHT.*

Language is but the instrument of mind. To study it on any other principle, is to make the object to be attained, subordinate to the means of its attainment. A man who would form himself as a writer, must acquire the control of his own intellectual powers. He must be capable of fixing his mind, with steady attention, to a single point, that he may compare and distinguish the relations of different things. “I never thought,”—says Baxter, “that I understood any thing, till I could anatomize it, and see the parts distinctly, and the union of the parts as they make up the whole.” This mental discipline accounts for the clearness and vigor of his style. A writer, who has not established habits of patient, exact thinking, will use words with indeterminate meaning, and unskilful arrangement.

But it is not enough for a writer to think clearly, on any single subject. He may understand his own meaning, and yet have but *little* meaning; he may be intelligible to others, and yet be *barren*. That his style may be interesting, it must be rich in matter. It must exhibit those intellectual qualities in himself, which presuppose good inventive powers, sharpened by much reflection, and patient acquisition of knowledge.

As a result of these principles, it must doubtless follow, that the man who sits down to write as the mere student of style, forgetting that language can be studied with advantage, only as the vehicle of thought, will be very liable to miss his aim. Some *object* he must have in writing, distinct from the attainment of a good style, or he will not write well. I know not that the style of Blair was formed in the method now condemned; but with all its good qualities, it possesses just those defects which I should expect such a process to produce.

**SECONDLY, STUDY YOUR OWN GENIUS.**

As in a man's features, and other exterior qualities of person,



so in his structure of mind, and habits of thinking, and of course in his style, there is an *individuality* of character. This appears in what he writes, with more or less distinctness, according to his native temperament, and the influence of circumstances, by which this temperament is strengthened, or controlled, or transformed. While every writer is bound to observe the established laws of grammar, and of rhetoric too, he is at liberty to consult his own taste, as to the general characteristics of the style which he shall adopt. Accordingly we find, among authors of the first rank, a considerable diversity. One is terse and sententious ; another, copious and flowing ; another, simple ; another, bold and metaphorical. Now, by losing sight of his own capacities and cast of mind, and attempting to be something altogether different from what his Creator intended, a man may not only fail of excellence, but make himself ridiculous. " Plato, in his younger days, had an inclination to poetry, and made some attempts in tragedy and epic ; but finding them unable to bear a comparison with the verses of Homer, he threw them into the fire, and abjured that sort of writing in which he was convinced that he must always remain an inferior." Next to the necessity of being well acquainted with your subject and yourself, I would say,

THIRDLY,—STUDY THE BEST MODELS.

To what *extent* the ancient classic writers should be included in this direction, as addressed to theological students, and young ministers, is a question, the formal discussion of which, would be inappropriate here. If sober men have good reason to be disgusted, at the extravagant claims sometimes advanced in behalf of classical learning, as certainly they have, still there is another extreme. The prevailing tendency of this age doubtless is, to fix a very inadequate estimate on the ancient classics, as models of taste and eloquence. An immense field of knowledge, is spread before our young men, in their training for public life ; and a rapid, superficial survey of this field, is expected of them, rather than the patient, elementary process of study, which is indispensable to thorough scholarship.

Considering, however, the infancy of our literary institutions ; the advanced age at which many of our students unavoidably commence their public education ; the embarrassments under which they pursue it ; and the urgent demand for active service, especially of preachers, it is not easy to fix on any definite attainments in classical learning, which should be required of those who are destined to the ministry. That some have been greatly blessed in this work, who had no pretensions to literary erudition, it were idle to question ; and certainly no one can hope for usefulness in this holy calling, without higher endowments than those of mere scholarship. It only remains for me then, in the briefest manner, to suggest some reasons, why a thorough acquaintance with the classics, is important to every Christian preacher, by whom it is attainable.

It is important because, without this, it is *hardly probable that he will ever acquire a complete acquaintance with the principles of his own language.* I do not mean to affirm that a tolerable degree of skill in English philology, must necessarily presuppose a knowledge of any other language. But I have no doubt that the *degree* of skill in our language, which is requisite for a public speaker, may be acquired with the least expense of time, by studying, as a preliminary, the regular, grammatical structure of the Latin and Greek.

For a still more obvious reason, classical learning may be useful to the preacher, *in regard to the lexicography* of his own language. He may comply exactly with the laws of syntax, and yet may use unauthorised words, or may use good words, without precision of meaning, or in a false meaning. Present good use is indeed the only paramount standard of language ; and the province of etymology is very liable to be overrated. But any one who considers how important it is to a speaker or writer, that he should use words in their exact signification, and considers to how large an extent, our words are of classical origin, will perceive at once, how greatly a familiar acquaintance with the derivation of these words, must contribute to precision and copiousness in language.

Classical learning is important to the preacher, because it gives him access to some of the *best examples, which the world has produced, in the department of taste and oratory.* In all the branches of general knowledge, the writings of Greece and Rome were of course far more restricted, as to range of thought, and richness of matter, than those of modern times. But as models of style and eloquence, no competent judge can doubt, that the ancient, classical works, still hold a rank, preeminent above all others. And though the *thoughts* of their authors may be tolerably learned from a good translation, he who would study these great masters with a view to *style*, must read them in their own language.

To these considerations, may be added another still, of a more general character, namely, the *wide field of improvement in theology and criticism, which is opened to the Christian student, from familiarity with the labors of the venerable dead.*

No wise man now, will devote his life, or any large share of it, to searching the endless tomes of antiquity, many of which, are nearly worthless. But there is another extreme. Antiquity had a few master spirits, who gave character to their own age, and to ages following. The influence they exerted on public opinion constitutes the chief elements of history. What did such men as Augustine believe?—how did they write?—how did they preach?—are questions which deserve at least some regard, in a liberal education for the ministry;—questions on which every Christian scholar *must have* opinions, either taken up at second hand, or derived from original sources of knowledge.\*

Under the general head of *Models*, I would certainly include a few of the *best poets.* This selection should be made from

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\* In acquiring information of this sort, theological students might perform a service, at once important to themselves and the church, by the systematic reading and translation of select passages, from the ancient fathers. Among these, deserve to be mentioned with special respect those illustrious cotemporaries, Jerome, Basil, Augustine, and Chrysostom; the two former distinguished for elegance, and the two latter for a fervid and powerful eloquence.

those whose works are characterized by richness, and vigor, and dignity, both of thought and language. A great poet is a moral painter. He knows the sources of emotion, and all the springs of action in the human bosom. The same graphic delineation, the same glow and vivacity, by which he rouses the imagination, and seizes the heart, constitute the power of eloquence. In this view, and this only, the Christian student may derive advantage from a judicious use of Shakspeare, as an anatomist of the human heart. It has been said, that "when this poet was born, nature threw away the mould in which his mind was formed." In respect to strong, original conception, and exact description, probably nothing of the kind has ever been written, equal to the best pieces of Shakspeare. Cowper's *Task*, while its object is not to exhibit a bold portraiture of the passions, often thrills the heart with touches of exquisite painting. With an ethereal delicacy and elevation of sentiment, to which Shakspeare was a stranger, it combines a more perfect command of the English language, as to copiousness and harmony of diction, than has been possessed by any of our standard writers except Pope. The *Paradise Lost* too, has passages of distinguished beauty, in respect to mere diction; while in respect to astonishing powers of imagination, it not only surpasses, but greatly surpasses, every other human composition. Let any Christian student of oratory, go through a patient analysis of the *Iliad* and the *Æneid*, and compare these with the great poem of Milton, and he will not fail to see that the grand and majestic conceptions of the latter, were owing to the fact that his genius was trained to sublimity in the school of the sacred writers.\*

\* On this subject, there is as much of truth, as there is of enthusiasm, in the following epigram of Dryden.

"Three poets, in three distant ages born,  
Greece, Italy, and England, did adorn.  
The first in loftiness of thought surpassed;  
The next in majesty;—in both, the last.  
The force of nature could no farther go;  
To make a third, she joined the former two."

Since the days of Milton, poems have been multiplied, possessing various, and some of them, great merits in other respects, but few of them aiming at sublimity, and none of them reaching it, with the exception of here and there a bold paragraph, or a figure. To name no others, the *Night Thoughts* and the *Course of Time*, in my opinion, may be read often and with much advantage, by young preachers, who are forming their style.

In respect to English prose writers, who deserve to be read as models, my remarks must be brief. If I were to fix on any period as the English Augustan age, it would be that including the latter division of the seventeenth, and the former of the eighteenth century; that is, the period from Charles the Second, to George the first, inclusive;—the middle of which, would be the time of Anne. To any one, aiming at the cultivation of a simple, classical, English style, I should of course recommend a good degree of familiarity with the writers of that period, including Addison, Pope, Swift, Steele, and Goldsmith, to extend the list no farther.

But a remark of elementary importance to be made in this connexion is, that essayists can be regarded only as models of style generally; but not of that style which is specially adapted to popular impression. The reasons of this distinction are obvious. The essay is a brief discussion, limited to a narrow range of thought,—written to be read,—written at leisure,—designed chiefly to amuse or instruct. The writer wants the scope, the excitement, the impelling motive, the “*vivida vis animi*,” of him who stands up to *speak*, in a public assembly with a thousand soul-inspiring eyes meeting his own. No man of common sense, if he had a real point of business to carry with such an assembly, would think of addressing them in the stately and elaborate periods of Johnson’s *Rambler*. Nor is the style of Junius, with all its strength and pungency, adapted to the ends of public speaking. The difference between the most studied speeches of Burke, and those of Chatham, illustrates

what I mean. The former scarcely received attention from the hearers ; the latter kept alive in their bosoms an intense interest, while his eloquence came down upon them, peal after peal, like the electric flame, and the thunderbolt. After a man has fixed the elementary character of his style, by studying the standard writers of the language, he may derive much greater advantage from the reading of good speeches, than from compositions executed in the form of essay.

As to sermons, it is a matter of course that the young preacher should make himself acquainted with those of the highest merit, especially in his own language. To designate these, is unnecessary here, as I have done it to some extent in another place.\* A single remark I will take the liberty of making, in this connexion, though by it I would not minister to that vanity, which has been said, (with too much truth doubtless,) to characterize our national literature. The remark is, that English sermons, have in general, less originality and strength of thought,—less weight of matter, and of sound, evangelical instruction, than American sermons ; and I will even add, less merit in point of diction. If this is true, while the intellectual rank of English preachers is presumed to be at least equal to those of our own country ; and their skill in other departments of writing, is doubtless superior, the fact just stated must be ascribed to causes of latent but powerful influence. Probably not the least of these causes is, a somewhat prevalent custom, in the established church, according to which the preacher delivers as his own, what he extracted from books, or procured to be written for him by another man.

It were perhaps useless, if not invidious, to make a distinction between English and Scotch writers. In respect to intellectual power and compass of thought, the latter are entitled to claim a rank certainly equal with the English. In style merely,

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\* Letters to Theol. Students on *Reading*.

so far at least as purity and idiom are concerned, they are inferior.\*

I am aware that after all, the utility of models in forming a style, is altogether denied by some ; but the denial is contrary to both philosophy and experience. How is it that all the useful arts are learned ? Not by inspiration, nor by precepts chiefly, but by *imitation*. How is it that we come to speak and write at all?—by *imitation*. How did the most eloquent writers of antiquity form themselves ? Plato, though he despaired of excelling Homer in poetry, by the very attempt, acquired a sweetness and majesty of style, which occasioned him to be called the “Homer of philosophers.” Demosthenes acquired his vehemence by studying Homer and Thucydides. Cicero incorporated into his manner, the strength of Demosthenes, the copiousness of Plato, and the delicacy of Isocrates.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his Discourses before the Royal Academy, (which I will say in passing, are as worthy to be read for their sound philosophy, as for their good English,) observes ; —“Invention is one of the great marks of genius ; but if we consult experience, we shall find, that it is by being conversant with the inventions of others, that we learn to invent ; as by reading the thoughts of others, we learn to think.” But he

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\* The question has often been put to me, “To what extent ought a theological student to read the *modern works of fiction*, with a view to improve his own style?” The inquiry has commonly had a primary regard to the writings of Walter Scott. To the magic of his genius, my own sensibilities have responded, whenever I have opened his pages ; but the very enchantment which he throws around his subject, has warned me to beware of putting myself in his power. This is one reason, why I have read but two or three of all the volumes of fiction from his prolific pen. Another reason is, that, as an Instructor of young ministers, I could not, with a good conscience, devote the *time* requisite for all this roading of romance ; nor am I willing, that my example should be made an occasion for others to do so, when I am in my grave. Be it that your style might be greatly improved, in some respects, by this reading, in others it might be greatly injured ; and the benefits may all be secured, in other ways, without the hazards.

would caution the student against a confined and partial imitation. The formation of his own *mind* is the great object. "He that imitates the Iliad, is not imitating Homer." "It is not by laying up in his memory the details of great works, that a man becomes a great artist, if he stops without making himself master of the general *principles* on which these works are conducted."

To derive advantage from models, then, they must be few; —must have decided excellencies; and must be allowed only their proper influence, in the formation of our own taste and habits; instead of drawing us into a servile copying of their peculiarities, especially their faults.\*

*The fourth requisite which I shall mention, in forming a good style, and one more important than any other, is THE HABIT OF WRITING.*

Cicero says, "the young orator's best master is his pen." It might be well supposed that educated men, who have had opportunity to be taught by their own experience, and that of others; men too who have devoted themselves to a profession, in which the pen is confessedly a prime instrument of respectability and usefulness, would need no lessons on this subject. But it is vain to close our eyes against the evidence of facts. A pious man, of good talents, may be indolent or diffident. Writing is labor; it calls his *mind* into effort; it compels him, at least should compel him to *think*. He dreads this labor. Through a false theory as to the management of his intellectual

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\* "As the air and manner of a gentleman can be acquired only by living habitually in the best society, so skill in composition must be attained by an habitual acquaintance with classical writers. It is indeed necessary that we should peruse many books, which have no merit in point of expression; but I believe it to be extremely useful to all literary men, to counteract the effect of this miscellaneous reading, by maintaining a constant and familiar acquaintance with a few of the most faultless models which the language affords. For want of some standard of this sort, we often see an author's taste in writing alter much to the worse, in the course of his life."

Dugald Stewart.



powers, or a morbid delicacy that holds them under restraint, especially where exposure to observation is implied,—he thinks it clear gain to escape exercises in writing, and to devote to reading the time allotted to these exercises. Thus he goes through his academical, and perhaps his professional studies, and comes forth with a stock of knowledge, more or less; but with an appalling consciousness that he is utterly destitute of skill to communicate his knowledge to others.

The capacity of writing well is not gained by accident, nor by miracle. Like every other valuable attainment, it is the result of labor. And he who acquires the habit of yielding to his reluctance, in this case, to say the least, greatly impairs his prospect of usefulness, if he does not chain himself down to obscurity for life. The man who would *become a writer*, must *write*. If his mind slumbers, if his delicacy or indolence starts back, he must apply the spur. He must be able to control his faculties, and apply them to his object, not by fits and intervals, but with a steady patience and perseverance. I would advise every man who is destined to the ministry, through his whole preparatory course, and even after it, frequently to place himself under the pressure of such an *urgent necessity* to write, as shall secure him from the danger of neglecting his pen.

The influence of *practice* on *despatch* in composition, deserves also to be mentioned. Supposing the general habit of writing with facility to be acquired, the rate at which a man may proceed, in a given case, will ordinarily be accelerated, in proportion to this facility. Much will depend, indeed, on familiarity with his subject, on the kind of subject he has in hand, on the interest it awakens in himself, and on the state of his animal and intellectual system. The operations of mind, in this case, are governed by laws, which subject them to the same varieties as attend other operations, in the physical or intellectual world. As the speed of a mariner depends on wind and tide, or of a traveller on the condition of his road, and the strength of his limbs, so the rapidity of a writer is much affected by circum-

stances. In this respect too, there is doubtless a difference in the structure and habits of different minds.

Johnson has often been mentioned as an example of rapid writing. In one day, his biographer says, he wrote twelve octavo pages; and in another day, including part of the night, he wrote forty eight pages. And it is certain that many of his compositions, which bear the marks of great labor, were written in such haste, as not even to be read over by him, before they were printed. But it should be remembered, that Johnson had trained his mind to a peculiar discipline. His habit was to think aloud; to look through his subject, and arrange his thoughts and expressions. He made little use of his pen, till he had 'formed and polished large masses, by continued meditation, and wrote his productions after they were completed.' Thus the act of writing was little more than the transferring from his memory to his paper, a composition already finished in his mind. That the *reputation of despatch* was not an object of ambition with Johnson, is evident from his very decided remarks on this subject; in which he says that this ambition appears in no ancient writer of any name, except Statius; and that he, as a candidate for lasting fame, chose to have it known that he employed twelve years on his *Thebais*.\*

Doubtless most men of taste have observed an important change, in the general characteristics of English style, since the time of Addison. One fact may go far to account for this change. At that day readers were few, and books were in demand, almost exclusively for the use of intellectual men. Now, all the world read; and authorship, consulting the state of the market, accommodates itself to the taste of all the world. The

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\* A friend of mine in the ministry, of no ordinary rank as to inventive genius, spent three months in writing, and remodelling a sermon, by which he wished to produce, and did produce a powerful public impression. In another case, he spent half a month in reading and investigation, preparatory to the writing of a single head in a sermon. Yet he could at any time preach a good sermon, with one *day*, and in case of emergency, with one *hour* for preparation.

fact that such a progress is going on in the diffusion of knowledge, among all classes, is one in which every philanthropist, and especially every Christian will rejoice. But while it is reasonable to expect that a thousand fold more books will be ushered into the world, than in former ages, the great mass of these probably, will have but an ephemeral existence, and after their brief day, being written only for the moment, will be forgotten. It is probable too that, among these, there will be very few or none of those great, elementary, standard works, which not only survive the fluctuations of caprice, and of occasional excitements, but are held in growing estimation, from age to age. This immortality of authorship depends not on popular suffrage, but on the judgment of the few who read with discriminating taste, and whose award of merit, always slowly pronounced, is, when distinctly pronounced, always irreversible. The pitiful sum given for the original copy-right of *Paradise Lost*, is too familiarly known to be repeated here; and to this day, that work has not been, and for most obvious reasons, it never can be, a *popular* work, in the same sense that many a work of modern romance is popular. Yet, when all these multifarious volumes, like successive swarms of summer insects, shall have been swept away by the breath of time, this great work of Milton will remain, an imperishable monument of its author's genius. So the writer of the *Iliad*, though held in comparatively low esteem by his cotemporaries, has been honored, through all succeeding ages, as the Father of Poetry.

“ Seven wealthy towns contend for Homer *dead*,  
Through which the *living* Homer begg'd his bread.

But the Christian minister ought to look above and beyond that literary immortality which is conferred on the principles of a merely unsanctified taste. The day is coming when the authorship of the Dairyman's Daughter will confer a reputation of higher value than that of the more splendid efforts of genius, the *Eneid* and the *Iliad*. What have these done to honor the true God, or to promote the immortal interests of men? It by

no means follows because Statius employed twelve years on his *Thebais*, and Virgil wrote his heroic poem at the rate of one line a day, that the pen of the Christian preacher ought to be governed, I do not say in all its movements, but in *any* of its movements, by the same principles.

You will ask me then, can he adopt any rule as to the proper degree of rapidity in writing? Keeping in view the remarks already made, I will only add by way of reply, let him avoid the two extremes of *over-exactness*, and of *heedless haste*.

There is a kind of mental paralysis, which lingers around a subject, in excessive caution, as to the choice and disposition of words, but accomplishes nothing. The writer who sits with his eyes closed, or looks at the wall of his study, hour after hour, waiting for the inspirations of genius, will never greatly benefit or harm the world by his productions. While your mind is warm in your subject, and your inventive powers thoroughly awake, the farther you can drive your pen at one sitting, the better, provided always, that you keep within proper limits of safety, as to mental or animal exhaustion. If you hesitate as to the choice of a word, never stop, amid the full impulse of thought, to consult your dictionary; but mark that word, to be disposed of at some moment of leisure.

On the contrary, there is a kind of *hurry* in writing, which destroys the balance of the mind, and leads to the utterance of half-formed thoughts, or clothes important thoughts in crude and obscure language. This may arise from a real want of time to do, what nevertheless must be done, and that within determinate limits. It may arise from an injudicious tasking of the pen to finish so many pages, by such an hour, when the matter in hand requires ten times the thought and caution, that would be requisite on another subject. Or it may arise from that pride of despatch, to which I have lately alluded, and which Horace ridicules in the vain poet who boasted, "how many verses he had made, while standing on one foot."

*As an appendage to the foregoing head, I will add a FIFTH and final direction;—ALWAYS TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT*

WHAT YOU WRITE IS CAPABLE OF AMENDMENT. I do not mean that whatever you write, through life, shall be corrected ; but that your early habits of exactness, ought to be, and may be so formed, by proper industry, as to supersede the necessity of all material corrections. In forming such habits, respectable men adopt different methods. One commits to paper a rough and rapid outline of his thoughts, always relying on his second draught for the completion of his work. Another, endeavours to make the original copy of his thoughts as perfect as possible with the intention of revising, but not of recomposing it, as a part of the primary labor of his pen. The former method has some advantages, when there is sufficient command of time, and a call for great exactness. But my own experience would lead me to prefer the latter, as the permanent habit of one who is pressed with the multiplied engagements of the ministry. No young man, however, should shrink from the labor of re-writing his earlier compositions, when he can unquestionably make them better by the process. After an interval has elapsed, sufficient to efface the partiality, which he feels at first towards the phraseology, that he has employed to express his thoughts, he can review the composition, and correct its faults.

Sir Joshua Reynolds, addressing young men on a kindred subject says, "Have no dependence on your own genius. Nothing is denied to well directed labor ; nothing is to be obtained without it. Impetuosity, and impatience of regular application, is the reason why many students disappoint expectation ; and being more than boys at sixteen, become less than men at thirty."

Gentlemen, though I have already dwelt, at so much length, on the different topics of this Lecture, I cannot close without adverting to another aspect of the subject, which presents in a strong light, the obligation of young ministers, to aim at the attainment of skill in writing. I refer to the intelligent cast of the age, and to the influence of the press.

It was always a truth of importance, but is more eminently so now, than in any past period since the world began, that skill in

wielding the pen is *moral power*. If used aright, it invariably confers respect on its possessor. When we see a perfect clock, we know that the maker acquired his skill, by studying the theoretic principles of his art, and by much practice ; and that the same man who made this, can make another. So when we see a finished composition, we know at once that it was produced by some gifted mind, accustomed to writing, and able to write again. So spontaneously do men judge in this manner, that a very short piece, like Gray's *Elegy*, sometimes confers a literary reputation on its author, for ages.

But the respect which attaches to the capacity of writing well, (and the same is true of speaking, understood in the large sense, for the communication of thought,) is of a higher sort than that which belongs to any other effort of mind. In the imitative arts, as painting for example, a man may attain a good degree of celebrity, with little more than the capacity of *copying* well. Writing demands native resources. It depends on talent and discipline. A happy accident led to the discovery of the mariner's compass, and of the telescope ; but no accident contributed to produce the *Paradise Lost*, which was, in the strictest sense, the result of inventive genius.

Hence the character of a nation depends essentially on her literary men ; because the very existence of these implies maturity and distinction, in other respects ; because the fame of her other great men, her warriors, for example, must be perpetuated chiefly through her writers ; and because her *books* are a truer standard of intellectual greatness, than her *looms*, or *commerce*, or *military achievements*. Sooner would Britain part with the fame even of her Marlborough or Nelson, than with that of her Newton, or Bacon, or Milton.

The application of these general remarks is easy. Christian ministers, now coming on the stage, should not only *acquire* the power of writing well, but should *use* this power, for the glory of God, and the good of men. The combined influence of the *pen* and the *press*, is the most astonishing moral machinery that ever was set at work in this world. It is opening a new aspect

on all the affairs of men. The question is settled too, that this machinery will be kept in active operation, for good or for evil, in every civilized community. Greece and Rome in their glory had no press ; and while this fact certainly contributed to the perfection of their *public speaking*, we cannot but wonder how they accomplished what they did, without the art of printing.

But the intercommunication of thought is no longer restricted to impressions to be made on popular assemblies, nor to oral addresses in any form. The influence of the press can reach every man at his fireside, and at every hour of the day ; it can carry hope to the peasant's cottage, or thunder the note of alarm to the ear of princes. As by the power of enchantment, it transfers the thoughts of one mind to millions of other minds, by a process silent and rapid, as the winds that sweep over a continent ; or like the light of day, which traverses the nations by a succession almost instantaneous. The book that was printed last month in London, is reprinted perhaps this month, beyond the Alleghany Mountains.

Young men ! destined to act for God and the church, in this wonderful day, think on this subject. Recollect that religious magazines, and quarterly journals, and tracts of various form, will control the public sentiment of the millions who shall be your cotemporaries, and your successors on this stage of action for eternity. To whose management shall this vast moral machinery be entrusted, if the educated sons of the church, the rising ministry of the age, will shrink from the labor and responsibility of the mighty enterprise ? *Learn* to use your pen, and *love* to use it. And in the great contest that is to usher in the triumph of the church,—let it not be said that you were too timid or indolent to bear your part.

## LECTURE XVII.

### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

#### THEY SHOULD BE EVANGELICAL.

The preceding course of Lectures on Preaching comprises a brief view of the History of the Pulpit, with such directions as I thought proper to give, respecting the choice of Texts and of subjects; the general principles to be observed in the plan and execution of a regular discourse; together with some remarks, on the Style of the pulpit.

But as an instructor of those who are to be instructors of others in the way of salvation, my work is by no means finished, when I have pointed out the proportions, the structure of parts, and the disposition of materials, which a skillful preacher will employ in the composition of a single discourse. There are certain *great principles of preaching*, which remain to be discussed, and which open a wide field for our contemplation. To some of these great principles, which are independent of all the local and temporary usages, that human caprice may prescribe to the pulpit, in different countries and periods, I propose now to call your attention. In exhibiting those *general characteristics* which I think Christian sermons ought to pos-



sess, and which I hope may be always predominant in the preaching of those, trained for the sacred office in our Seminary, I shall avoid every thing of the technical and scientific manner, aiming both in sentiment and expression, to be simple, serious, and practical. Indeed, the object I have in view requires me, not so much to discuss disputed principles relative to preaching, as an art or science, as to spread before your minds those plain, solemn views of this great work, which may assist each of you, in his preparatory efforts, to become "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." Debarred as I am from access to books of reference, except a very few that I have with me from my own library,\* I shall, of necessity, give you the results of my own reflections, rather than the theories of others.

*The FIRST characteristic of a good sermon, on which I am about to enlarge, IS, THAT IT SHOULD BE EVANGELICAL.*

To do justice to my own views on this subject, it will be proper to state what I mean by evangelical preaching; and then to show, that all preaching ought to possess this character.

1. WHAT IS EVANGELICAL PREACHING? I answer, it is the same as is sometimes called *preaching Christ*, an expression by which the Apostles meant, not chiefly preaching as Christ himself did, and as he commanded ministers to preach; but especially preaching so, as to exhibit Christ in his true character, as the great object of faith and love. The same meaning is sometimes expressed by the phrase, "preaching the cross," and preaching "Christ crucified." The simple fact that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, is but a small part of this meaning. This fact was unquestionable, and could never have been, either a "stumbling-block or foolishness" to Jews or Greeks. But as the apostles referred to this fact, it stood

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\* Written on a southern tour.

for a *system of faith*, that was repulsive to human pride. As they used language, "Christ crucified" included all that is implied in salvation by grace. It is the sum of Christianity. Accordingly preaching the "doctrines of grace," is another phrase equivalent to "preaching the cross."

Every science is built on elementary facts, which must go together, and must be fully exhibited to teach that science with success. The gospel as a complete system of truth, has its own essential principles; and without the clear exhibition of these, the gospel cannot be preached, any more than geometry can be taught, while its essential principles are denied or overlooked. Whatever proposition in this science you undertake to prove, you cannot proceed one step, except on the admission of the principles on which the science is built. Just so in preaching the gospel. Suppose the doctrine of *atonement* is your subject; how are you to proceed? Of course you must admit man to be in a state of ruin; ruin from which he needs redemption; ruin so desperate that he could not redeem himself. If saved at all, it must be by the interposition of an all-sufficient, vicarious sacrifice. If justified at all, it must be "freely, by the grace of God." So it is with other subjects. The doctrines of grace must go together; you cannot consistently admit one, without going the length of the whole system.

According to these views, I need not take up time in showing, that sermons in which the doctrine of atonement, and other essential doctrines of the gospel are avowedly discarded, or decidedly overlooked, come altogether short of evangelical preaching. But it is to my purpose to remind you in this connexion, that even among ministers whose general views of the gospel are correct, there is much preaching which cannot be called evangelical. I would not say or imply, that every sermon ought to discuss, in set form, some essential principle of Christianity; but every sermon ought to exhibit the *spirit* of Christianity, and to derive its appeals to the heart from the *motives* of Christianity. It is not enough that it inculcate what is both true and important; for this it may do, and yet deserve not the name of

a Christian sermon. My meaning may be illustrated by familiar historic examples. Socrates taught the being of a God, and the doctrine of immortality, and eternal retribution. Cicero taught temperance, benevolence, truth, justice, &c. Seneca enforced the same duties, by grave lessons drawn from the dialectics of the schools. Now, suppose that you urge the same topics, in the same manner, from the pulpit. Is it Christian preaching? By no means. The things taught are true and important; but the spirit, the motives, the tendency, are not Christian. You have delivered such a sermon as Paul could not have delivered, consistently with his solemn purpose not to “know any thing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

Do I mean then to find fault with a minister, for preaching on the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, or the duties of temperance, truth, and justice? Certainly not. But I mean that he should preach these subjects, not as a heathen philosopher; preach them, not as *independent* of the Christian system, but as *parts* of that system; so that all his arguments, and motives, and exhortations shall be drawn from the authority, and exhibit the spirit of the gospel. The minister who believes the divine all-sufficiency of Christ as a Saviour, and the absolute dependence of sinners on his atonement, and the efficacy of the Holy Spirit for salvation, can hardly preach a sermon on any occasion or subject without showing that he *does thus believe*. One of our venerable divines\* has well said, “Faithful ministers never preach mere philosophy, nor mere metaphysics, nor mere morality. If they discuss the being and perfections of God, the works of creation and providence, the powers and faculties of the human soul, or the social and relative duties, they consider all these subjects as branches of the one comprehensive system of the gospel. Hence, when they preach upon the inward exercises of the heart, they represent love, repentance, humility, submission, sobriety &c. not as *moral virtues*, but as

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\* Emmons.

*Christian graces.* And when they discourse upon moral topics, they inculcate the duties of rulers and subjects, of parents and children, masters and servants, by motives drawn from the precepts and sanctions of the gospel."

There is one caution growing out of these remarks, which, if I mistake not, is practically important to students of this Seminary, in respect to early efforts in sermonizing. Whenever I have observed a young man, from pride of talent, or fastidious taste, or, (what is probably in most cases the radical defect,) a low state of personal piety, attempt to make what is called, a *great sermon*; I mean when the effort is, by eccentricity of subject or manner, to exhibit his own genius or erudition, I have always observed that effort to be a *failure*, and sometimes a *grievous* one. And I have been ashamed and mortified to see the same principle exemplified, in ministers of full age; and I might add, exemplified more than once, in my own experience. So true is it, that when ministers do not make it their simple object to preach the "truth as it is in Jesus," God will withhold from them the ordinary testimonies of his approbation, and among these, the conscious satisfaction of success in their labors.

II. *We are to consider the main position of this Lecture, namely, that ALL PREACHING OUGHT TO BE EVANGELICAL.*

Several topics that might properly be introduced under this head, will be reserved for another place. The considerations which I have now to suggest, are chiefly two;

I. That *evangelical preaching might REASONABLY BE EXPECTED to answer, better than any other, the great ends of preaching.* What are these ends? The glory of God, in the sanctification, and salvation of sinners. How then are sinners to be sanctified and saved? By knowing and embracing the system of truth which God has revealed in the gospel, and commanded his ministers to publish. And can it be that the system which infinite wisdom has devised, for a given purpose, is no better adapted to promote that purpose, than an opposite system, or no system at all? Will men be induced to receive

and love the doctrines of grace, by the influence of that pulpit which never exhibits these doctrines? Will they be induced to flee for refuge to the cross, by preaching which never urges upon them "Christ and him crucified?"

Let us now glance at some of the principal points of the evangelical system, and see why these are adapted to give special interest and success to preaching.

This system shows men that with God, the *heart*, and not, (as they are presumingly inclined to suppose,) the external conduct, is the standard of moral character.

It shows them that the heart of the unsanctified man is *entirely sinful*; that it is his *own* heart, and he is *personally responsible to God*, for all its wrong affections;—That *eternal death* is the *just desert* of every sinner, because the law which he has broken is "holy, just, and good," and one which he is bound to obey *perfectly*, and with *all his heart*. Let us pause here for a moment. The above doctrines, if they are solemnly urged home upon the conscience, it is easy to see, must make men feel *guilty*, and therefore feel *unsafe*. They *must* disturb the deadly insensibility, in which careless men love to repose, and produce solicitude and alarm. But let them *be taught*, and let them *embrace* any system of lax theology, which allows them to deny their own depravity, or ascribe it to Adam or Satan, or God; let them become persuaded that *sin* is merely "human infirmity," and that sinners are but the "frail and erring children of their heavenly Father," (for so men have often been instructed from the pulpit,) and they feel no trembling apprehension of the "fire that shall never be quenched,"—no deep solicitude, to "flee from the wrath to come."

But to proceed with our enumeration,—The evangelical system shows men, that from the fearful curse and condemnation, which rest on every transgressor of the divine law, no one can escape, on the ground of any satisfaction which he himself is able to make.—It shows them that Christ has interposed, for the rescue of lost men from this desperate condition, by the sacrifice of himself on the cross; that repentance and faith are

now the indispensable and immediate duty of every sinner, to whom the gospel is known ;—but still, that the stubborn hostility of the carnal mind to this gospel is such, that no sinner will cordially embrace it, except through the sovereign, heart-subduing, and transforming influence of the Holy Ghost.

Take the foregoing particulars, and follow them out, in reference to the principle I am illustrating, and suppose the combined influence of these truths to bear down upon the heart and conscience, in the weekly ministrations of the pulpit, and it will be most evident, that the hearers of such preaching can hardly remain in total indifference to religion. The direct tendency is, to make them solemn and anxious ; to show them their dependence on a justly offended God ; and to keep constantly before the mind the great question, “ Am I in a state of salvation, or a state of wrath ? ” Such effects may be reasonably expected to result from preaching, which exhibits with power and pungency, the holy strictness of the law, the love of a bleeding Saviour, and, (paradox as it may seem to unbelief,) the *doctrine of election*, or the absolute dependence of the sinner on sovereign mercy, a truth which I am sorry to believe is of late, comparatively little urged from our pulpits. I say again, let a minister build up his hearers in a *half-way religion* ; let him teach them that the law, originally demanding perfect holiness, is *modified* now to suit the “ lapsed condition ” of sinners ; that to punish them eternally, for casual aberrations, would be “ unmerciful tyranny ; ” that the gospel is a scheme of *commiseration*, which regards men as *wretched*, rather than as *guilty* ; that God requires them, not to repent immediately, but instead of immediate repentance, to *use means*, and do the *best they can* in their helpless condition ; let him teach them thus, and they become environed with a triple wall of brass, to repel evangelical conviction. O how dreadful must be his reckoning, when it shall appear that these immortal hearers may have followed every direction of their spiritual guide, in every punctilio, and yet be eternally shut out from hope and heaven !

But we need not rest this argument on any abstract *tendency* of evangelical preaching; for

2. *Another source of evidence remains, which is decisive, the evidence of FACTS.* From this it appears, that the preaching of the evangelical system, is attended with a salutary and sanctifying efficacy, which belongs to no other system. The question becomes one of historical verity, on which the proof is so ample and triumphant, as greatly to exceed the limits that can be allotted to it in this discussion.

The ground which I take is, that God has usually attended the faithful preaching of the gospel with a *signal success*, through the influence of his own Spirit; and that he has thus set upon it the unquestionable and special stamp of his own approbation. In proof of this, the recorded experience of the church may be adduced, in one accumulated and overwhelming testimony. If this cannot be established by an unbroken line of facts, from the Apostles' days, no point can ever be proved by history.

What was it that occasioned the first great declension from the spirit of godliness, in the primitive church? The simple gospel, as it was preached by Christ and the Apostles, was obscured, by admixtures of human speculations, especially the theories of the Platonic philosophy. Instead of Christ crucified, the *subtleties* of the *schools* gradually came to occupy the pulpit. Sermons were moulded on the elaborate precepts of Grecian oratory. The spirit of piety was supplanted by love of novelty, and by the vagrant dreaming of mystical theology, founded on the grossest perversion of the sacred oracles. What was the consequence? When this wide door was opened, Pelagianism and Arianism rushed in, like a flood, upon the church.

Now let any honest man, acquainted with history, be put to answer the question,—who were the great moral luminaries that beamed upon the world, through seasons of intervening darkness? and he cannot fail to name such champions of the evangelical faith, as Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom;

afterwards, Bernard, Huss, Jerome of Prague, Wickliffe; and the constellation of illustrious reformers, in the time of Luther.

The sanctifying influence of evangelical sentiments, is exhibited in the character of the English Puritans. Neal in his history, gives the following, strong testimony; "They were the most resolved Protestants in the nation; zealous Calvinists, warm and affectionate preachers. They were the most pious and devout people in the land; men of prayer, in secret and in public, as well as in their families. Their manner of devotion was fervent and solemn, depending on the assistance of the divine Spirit. They had a profound reverence for the holy name of God; and were great enemies not only to profane swearing, but to foolish talking and jesting. They were strict observers of the Lord's day, spending the whole of it, in public and private devotion and charity. It was the distinguishing mark of a Puritan, in these times, to see him going to church twice a day, with his Bible under his arm; and while others were at plays and interludes, at revels, or walking in the fields, or at the diversions of bowling, fencing &c. on the evening of the sabbath, these with their families were employed in reading the scriptures, singing psalms, repeating sermons, catechising their children, and prayer. Nor was this the work only of the Lord's day, but they had their hours of family devotion on the week days; they were circumspect, as to all excess in eating and drinking, apparel and lawful diversions; being frugal, industrious, exact in their dealings, and solicitous to give every one his own." Truly there was an awful contrast between the morality of these Puritans, and that of those who rejected the evangelical system.

The state of the church in later periods confirms the same sentiment. A competent judge, though by no means partial to Whitefield and his associates, said; "The revival of the doctrines of grace, was the great object of their labors. Their preaching had a mighty influence, in turning many from the power of Satan unto God, as well as in awakening a general at-



tion to religious subjects. They were themselves distinguished, for the most part, by peculiar sanctity of life; by superiority to the world; by much integrity; and by unwearied zeal and diligence in their profession. Their conduct still, more than their doctrines, served to reprove the whole body of lukewarm ministers in the establishment." A learned infidel says, of the modern Calvinists and Jansenists, that, "When compared with their antagonists, they have excelled, in no small degree, in the most rigid and respectable virtues;—that they have been an honor to their own ages, and the best model for imitation to every age succeeding." Dr. Priestly admits that, "they who hold the doctrines of grace, have less apparent conformity to the world, and more of a principle of real religion, than" his own followers; and that they who, "from a principle of religion, ascribe more to God and less to man than others, have the greatest elevation of piety." He ascribes what he calls the cool and unbiassed temper of Unitarians, to their becoming "more indifferent to religion in general," in all "its modes and doctrines;" and accounts for the fact that "their societies do not flourish," by saying, that "their members have but a slight attachment to them, and easily desert them."

Job Orton, in his old age, warning a young minister against the loose, moral strain of preaching, says, that ministers who have adopted this, have brought "their congregations into a wretched state. In several of this neighborhood, there are not now as many *scores*, as there were *hundreds* in their meeting places, fifty years ago." "But I never knew," he adds, "an *instance*, where the minister was a pious, serious, evangelical preacher, but his congregation kept up, though death and removals had made many breaches in it."

Bogue and Bennet, in their History of Dissenters, say that, where a minister has been anti-evangelical, "his congregation has fallen into decay;"—"that where Arianism filled the pulpit, it invariably emptied the pews;" and that "where Socinianism found an entrance, its operations were quicker still," often reducing "flourishing societies to a few families," and some-

times transforming what had been "the house of prayer, into an undisturbed abode of the spiders, and the bats."

Andrew Fuller, whose candor, and competence to judge on the subject, no one can dispute, says, "There are a great many places of worship in this kingdom, where the Socinian and Arian doctrines have been taught, till the congregations are dwindled away, and there are scarcely enough left to keep up the form of worship."\*

Similar results are witnessed on the continent of Europe. A traveller who resided for a time at Göttingen, where lax theology has possession of the pulpit, says, that where he attended church, there were almost no hearers, and the doors were locked, to prevent their escape. "There are here, (he adds,) seven churches, of which only one has a second service on the Sabbath; and only one clergyman can be said to have an audience. In a venerable church, near my abode, I counted one Sunday about thirty persons, besides a small school of children. On a dull Sabbath, my attendant told me he had been at church; I asked how many people were there? He said, there were *three* besides himself. Accordingly the Sabbath is a day of amusement and business. Except in hours of worship, shops are open, as on other days. Even clergymen, when the service of the morning is over, consider that there is no farther bond on their conscience; and common people are seen dancing and drinking."

Facts of the same bearing on my main point, might be multiplied without end; I am however, aware, beloved pupils, that the detail is already more than would be proper, did I not wish to leave on your minds one strong, practical impression, namely that God gives success to no other preaching but that which

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\* "Raise me but a *barn* in the very shadow of St. Paul's cathedral, and give me a man, who shall preach Christ crucified, with something of the energy which the all-inspiring theme is calculated to awaken; and you shall see the former crowded with warm hearts, while the matins and vespers of the latter, if the gospel be not preached there, shall be chanted to the statues of the mighty dead."

*James' Sermon before the London Missionary Society.*

exhibits the plain, simple truths of his gospel, such as the lost condition of man by nature, salvation by grace only, through the atoning blood of Christ, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. So did Knox, Latimer, Howe, Owen, and Baxter preach. Of the last, Dr. Bates says, "Kidderminster, before his coming there, was like a piece of dry and barren earth, but by the blessing of heaven on his labors, the face of Paradise appeared there, in all the fruits of righteousness." So did Edwards, Bellamy, Davies, and the Tennants preach, those lights of the American church, and instruments of her glorious revivals of religion, in the last century. So have the Fathers of the New England churches generally preached. So may the young heralds of the cross, trained for their holy work in our beloved Seminary, preach, while the sun and moon endure.

## LECTURE XVIII.

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### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

In the foregoing Lecture, I endeavored to show, that, from the nature of the case, and from the actual state of facts, in the history of the church, we have no reason to expect the blessing of God, on any preaching but that which is distinctly *evangelical*. But other things are requisite, to constitute a good sermon; and I shall now consider, at some length,

A SECOND, *general characteristic of a good sermon, which is, that IT MUST BE INSTRUCTIVE.*

For the sake of method, I shall inquire,

I. *WHAT THINGS ARE REQUISITE to render a sermon instructive.*

1. In the first place, then, I say it must have a *subject, that is important*; a subject which spreads before the hearers some serious truth to be believed, or duty to be done, or danger to be avoided. So obvious is this principle, that to dwell on it, or even to mention it, would seem superfluous, were it not that many a discourse has been preached, in which it is

apparently the object of the preacher, not so much to enlighten his hearers, as to any one thing to be believed, or done, or avoided, as to fill up the time allotted to a sermon. It by no means follows that a sermon *is a good one*, because you can state in a word, or in a short sentence, that it is on the subject of repentance, or faith, or humility ; but it certainly follows that it is *not a good one*, if neither they who hear it, nor he who delivers it, can tell concisely what is its subject. I have heretofore adverted to the common mistake of young preachers, in selecting such general subjects as “the vanity of the world.”—“the universal desire of happiness,” &c. on which a man of genius, and of experience might indeed give to an assembly many profitable instructions, but to do which would cost him three times as much reflection, as would be requisite to preach well, on some specific point of faith or practice.

The apprehension that, on a subject of the latter kind the stock of materials, for a regular discourse, would be too soon exhausted, often leads him who has little skill in sermonizing, to select a subject of so much scope, that he might nearly as well have no subject.

But whether the subject be general or specific, it should be *important*. For a man who is commissioned to preach the everlasting gospel, to pass over all those topics which involve the highest interests of his hearers, and gravely to instruct them from the pulpit, on points critical, speculative, or merely curious, is “to prostitute his noble office.” Such topics may procure a temporary reputation to himself, while he only amuses his hearers, at the expense of their souls. Bishop Wilkins, who was a judicious adviser in these matters, says ;—“Avoid all subjects that would *divert* the hearers, without *instructing* them. Never consult your fancy, in this case, but the necessities of your flock. I would rather send away the hearers smiting on their breasts, than please the most learned audience with a fine sermon. By discussing useless questions, and things above their capacities, we too often perplex those whom we should interest.

There is a great deal of difference between their admiring the preacher, and being edified by his sermons."

2. *A sermon, to be instructive, must be* PERSPICUOUS, IN METHOD AND LANGUAGE.

On the advantages and kinds of *divisions* proper in discourses from the pulpit, and the principles by which such divisions should be conducted, I have expressed my views at large in discussing the structure of sermons. I will only add in this connexion, that to give instruction, at least to common minds, without a good degree of lucid arrangement in the things taught, is quite impossible. That such arrangement should prevail in a sermon, is just as important, I must repeat, as that the hearers should understand that sermon, and remember it. For assuredly, unless they can follow the preacher, step by step, in some intelligible train of thought, they will understand nothing, and of course remember nothing, to any valuable purpose; in other words, they will gain no instruction.

That the *language* of a sermon should be intelligible, is so plainly essential to its being instructive, that no enlargement on this head is called for, except to refer you to observations which I have made on style, and to those which I shall have occasion to make on the indefinite and the direct manner in preaching. Like Paul, "I would rather speak five words, in the church, with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue."

3. *That a sermon may be instructive, it must be* RICH IN MATTER.

An important subject it may have, and lucid arrangement of plan, and perspicuity of diction; and yet it may amount to little more than a tame and sterile succession of remarks, in which the preacher seems to have written, at great leisure, such thoughts as happened to come to him; or else to have made copious transcripts from his reference Bible; presuming that such extracts from the sacred pages, whether pertinent or not to the case in hand, must be profitable to the hearers. It is truly lamentable, that the liberty of quotation from this treasury of sa-

cred knowledge, should ever be so abused by the dulness of the preacher, as to render even Scripture, *not* profitable, either for doctrine, or reproof, or instruction in righteousness.

Want of matter in a sermon, from whatever cause the deficiency may arise, diminishes its value to the hearers, in point of instruction. If the difficulty arises from want of native talent in the preacher, if he is destitute of inventive power, there is no remedy. Precepts and study may do something; but the stamp of barrenness will be fixed on all the labors of such a mind. If it arises not from want of intellectual *capacity*, but of intellectual *cultivation*, in the preacher, in other words, if his discourses are barren of instruction because he has himself a scanty stock of acquired knowledge, the remedy lies in *study*. A mind invigorated and replenished by habits of reflection and reading, will impart its own character to all its efforts. That the stream may be abundant and unfailing, it must flow from a fountain that is inexhaustible. When I speak of acquired knowledge, I mean to express the deliberate opinion, that no man who does not, according to the direction of Paul, “give himself to *reading*,” can be a profitable preacher, to the same audience, for any considerable time. Reliance on mere intellectual powers, to the neglect of reading, will leave even a superior mind unfurnished with all that store of knowledge, which the progress of ages has accumulated in books, and in books only. Besides, the mind that has no fellowship with the world of contemporary minds, and of minds that have stamped their impress on the books of past periods,—such a mind, vigorous though it may be, will lose its own elasticity. To sustain the intellectual powers, and keep them in readiness for action, both the *information* and the *impulse* derived from reading are necessary; but to a mind already well furnished, doubtless the primary advantage of books, is their aid in rousing its own energies. Of course, he who is called to instruct others from the pulpit, must not merely *have been* a man of reading, he must *read still*, while he preaches, or his sermons will be trite and barren in thought.

I would urge every candidate for the sacred office, to form, as early as possible, the habit of reading and thinking, *as a preacher*. Let all his intellectual exercises acquire this cast, and have general reference to this one grand business of his life. The painter, the sculptor, the architect, the military chief, who has professional enthusiasm, each will see in every object around him, those relations to his own favorite pursuit, which are unobserved by other men. So should the preacher see with the eyes of his own profession; and when his mind goes abroad in intercourse with the external world, with men and books, it should be to bring home stores adapted for use in his business as a Christian Instructor. This will give to his sermons a richness and variety of matter, that will make them eminently useful.\*

It may be added in passing, that such a systematical classification of a man's knowledge, especially his knowledge derived from books, will store his mind with *facts*; and give him the *power of illustration*, the want of which will certainly make a dull preacher.

But in aiming to render sermons rich in matter, that they

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\* In respect to the point under consideration, it is of incalculable advantage to the preacher, early to adopt the habit of *classification* in his reading. Let him keep a blank-book, consisting of materials for sermons, in which he will insert, with proper heads and arrangement, the most important *subjects* on which he will have occasion to preach. I do not mean a *plan* book;—that is another affair, to be kept by its lf. Under each of these subjects, let him enter some brief notice, not a transcript of passages, but a *brief notice* of what is most striking in any writer that he reads, with references to *author*, and *page*, and *edition* too, when the book is not his own. This will never become voluminous, like the cumbrous Common Place books used for transcribing entire pages, to which practice there are insuperable objections. A quarto blank-book, of two hundred pages, will perhaps serve a man for life; and, in a few years, will become such an index of his own reading, as will enable him to avail himself, in one hour, of what he has been reading for years; and often on a given subject, will, in a few moments, put him in possession of materials for which he might otherwise search a long time, and perhaps search in vain. The *alphabetical* order for such a blank-book, is probably the best, allowing the greatest space to the most important letters.



may be instructive, two mistakes are to be avoided. The first is, a *sweeping generality*, which aims to bring the *whole system of religion into one sermon*. After what I have already said on this point, I advert to it here, only to remark, that discourses constructed in this manner, instead of being rich and various in matter, are usually distinguished for barrenness of thought. The other mistake consists in attempting *perpetual novelty* of matter. The former mistake commonly results from *dulness*;—the latter from *affectation*. The same sun shines in the firmament, and the same Bible is the light of the moral world, from age to age. In regard to merely human opinions, or rules of conduct, eccentricity and caprice are to be expected. But the prominent truths of revealed religion, like their Author, are immutable. The same God, and Redeemer, and Sanctifier,—the same way of salvation too, are to be preached now, as were preached by prophets and Apostles. What was the example of Paul, as to originality and variety? Did he deem it necessary to preach *new* doctrines in every sermon? So far from this, he urged and reiterated the same essential points of faith and practice, again and again, on those whom he addressed. Just the same did the other Apostles. Hear what Peter said to those who had been under his instruction. “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye *know* them, and be *established in the present truth*.” Nay, it was his design, not only to render these truths familiar to his hearers, while he taught them, but so to impress them on their minds, by frequent repetition, that they should never be forgotten. “I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.” So men are taught by the instructions of Providence; and so, I need not scruple to say, they have been taught, from the pulpit, by the most skilful preachers, in all ages.

But where, it may be said, on these principles, lies the room for variety and richness of matter? It lies in the endless scope for *illustration*, by which the preacher of competent powers has opportunity to present the truths of the gospel, in aspects and

relations so diversified, that while the *same* truths are taught, over and over, the hearers see them in new lights, and with eager interest stretch forward in knowledge.

Is not the book of providence various, rich, beautiful, and even sublime in its instructions? Yet the sun travels the same path through the heavens, and the seasons preserve their order. Regularity and repetition, in the natural world, fix impression; so that uniformity in its laws, is the basis of knowledge. If every fact in the kingdom of nature should occur but once, and the course of events should be a succession of absolute *novelties*, experience could not be the ground of foresight, the lessons of providence would convey no valuable instruction to men, and the business of the world must cease. The same principles apply to the instructions of the pulpit. They need not be tame and barren of interest, because they often dwell on the same great truths of religion. On the contrary, the man who, from affectation of constant novelty, should teach his hearers the doctrine of *atonement*, for example, but once in his life, might as well never have mentioned it at all.

4. *That a sermon may be instructive*, ITS MATERIALS SHOULD GENERALLY BE THROWN INTO THE FORM OF DISCUSSION, IN DISTINCTION FROM THE DESULTORY MANNER.

My remarks on this topic will be brief, as partly superseded by those already made on *Argument in Sermons*. There is indeed a dry, technical mode of discussing subjects, which gives a logical air to a discourse, but which wearies rather than instructs the hearers. The formality of propositions and corollaries, is not at all the thing that I am recommending. But it is incumbent on the preacher to give his hearers substantial *reasons* for that which he urges on them, as a matter of faith or duty. The Senator, or the advocate at the bar, when he speaks, aims to establish some point by reasoning. Why should a Christian discourse be a mere declamatory harangue, not aiming to establish the truth of any thing, or to make any definite impression? Will it be said that, in the eloquence of the senate and the forum, argumentation is indispensable, because men

will not act till they are enlightened and convinced? but that, in the sanctuary, the main object is to produce excitement and warmth? Of what *value* is that warmth, which is produced by the mere vociferation of a declaimer, and which vanishes, when the sound of his voice ceases? In my opinion, one of the greatest calamities that can befall a congregation, is to sit under the ministry of a man who never discusses any subject in a regular manner, nor attempts to prove any thing, from reason and scripture: but gives his hearers declamation, instead of Christian instruction. Such sermons, if strictly *unpremeditated*, are more likely perhaps to have occasional flashes of vigor and vivacity, than if *precomposed*, in the *extemporary and desultory* mode of writing. In either case, they will utterly fail of *instructing* the hearers.

5. *That sermons may be instructive*, THEY MUST EXHIBIT DIVINE TRUTH IN ITS CONNEXIONS.

Men in general spontaneously read and think very little on religious subjects. What they know of the gospel, they learn more from the pulpit, than from all other sources. No one sermon can contain the whole of Christianity; yet Christianity *is a connected, consistent whole*, which must be exhibited in parts; and no part can be fully understood, except in its relations to the rest. In every art or science, as I have before remarked, there are fixed principles, which are to be learned distinctly, but which are inseparably related to each other. A knowledge of that art or science, is a knowledge of each part, and of its relative bearing on other parts. One principle of geometry, detached from the rest, signifies nothing;—the whole taken together constitute a perfect science. The wheels of a clock, viewed apart from the whole machinery, would apparently have no design; and any one of these wheels, indeed, if formed by the artist without regarding its adaptation to the rest, would be altogether useless. So it is in the system of religious doctrines; any one of these, dis severed from its connexion with the rest, for example, the doctrine of *election*, may be so distorted, that it virtually ceases to be true. It is true in the connexion in

which the Bible has placed it ; but apart from that connexion it is liable to be *misunderstood*, and to have all the influence of falsehood.

To preach the gospel *instructively* then, is to preach all its parts, especially its essential parts ; and to preach them in their symmetrical relation to one harmonious, connected scheme of religion. This will prevent that “inconsistency which runs through the whole course of some men’s preaching, who not only contradict in one discourse, what they have said in another, but say and unsay the same things, in the same discourse.” The amount of my meaning is, that no single truth of the gospel can be adequately taught from the pulpit, without being taught in its connexions with the general scope of revealed religion ; and the result is, that partial and superficial preaching, is not *instructive* preaching. Men may hear sermons through a whole life, which inculcate no falsehood, but on the contrary exhibit, in a detached way, one principle after another of true religion, and yet these hearers may never acquire an adequate knowledge of any one doctrine of the Bible.

The foregoing are some of the principal qualities of sermons, necessary to render them *instructive*.

## LECTURE XIX.

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### CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

I shall proceed now,

II. *To look at* THE REASONS *why it ought to be a prominent object with a Christian preacher,* TO RENDER HIS SERMONS INSTRUCTIVE.

1. That this *is his duty may be inferred* FROM THE CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN MIND. The service which God requires of men is a *reasonable* service. All the laws of his moral kingdom are adapted to the condition of intelligent, moral agents. This kingdom is a kingdom of *motives*; and no action can possess a moral nature, except as it results from *intelligence* and *purpose* in the mind of the agent. The understanding, therefore, is that leading faculty of the soul, to which motives are addressed; and through which their influence bears on the heart, and conscience, and affections. Whatever emotion or action can be produced, without any intelligent, voluntary purpose in the agent, must be as destitute of moral qualities, as are the actions of a maniac, or the ebbing and flowing of the tide. But if men are so made as to be influenced by motives,

and this influence can operate only through the medium of light and conviction addressed to the understanding, then the sermon that communicates no *instruction* is useless, not being adapted to the constitution of the human mind.

2. *That the Christian preacher should aim to render his sermons instructive, IS EVIDENT FROM THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL.* What is the gospel? It is a system of evangelical truth; a stupendous scheme of mercy, the great design of which is to sanctify men through the truth. The sword of the Spirit, by which only the enmity of the human heart is slain, and the moral temper is renovated, is the word of God. But how can divine truth operate so as to enlighten the conscience, and sanctify the heart, unless it is distinctly *presented to the mind*? If evangelical belief might exist, without a knowledge of God and the Saviour, why should the gospel be preached at all? Most evidently when God sanctifies a human heart, it is through the truth, and the truth so presented to the mind as to be *perceived and understood*.

What is the gospel? I say farther, it is a system of *practical* truths; in other words, a system of truths on which is predicated a system of *duties*. The end of faith is practice. Hence the Bible attaches importance to each truth which it reveals, just in proportion to the influence which that truth is adapted to exert over the heart and life. It exhibits no single doctrine as a matter of dry speculation, without reference to its bearing on the affections, and the conduct. But it is only an *intelligent view* of truth, that can exert the influence of which I am speaking. The gospel, for example, requires me to *repent*. Why do I need intellectual light for this? What *is* it to repent? It is to hate my own sins, as being the transgression of a perfect law. How then can I repent, without a *knowledge* of my own sins, and of the law that I have broken? The gospel enjoins *faith* in Christ as a divine and all-sufficient Saviour. But how can I believe in him without knowing that I *need* a Saviour, and that he is *such* a Saviour as I need? The gospel enjoins *prayer*; but how can I pray acceptably to a God, of whose character and will

I have no just conceptions? ‘Ignorance may be the mother of such devotion as was offered to Diana of the Ephesians, or the unknown God of the Athenians; but the worship which the God of the Bible will accept, is rational and spiritual. It requires that the *understanding*, as well as the affections should be employed. Short of this, whatever has the semblance of Christian devotion, is as unmeaning as the ablutions of the Hindoo, or the sacrifices at Mars Hill.’\*

A distinction has often been made between *doctrinal* and *practical* preaching, which is meant to imply that ministers who dwell on the great *truths* of Christianity, neglect to inculcate its moral duties; whereas the direct reverse is true, when doctrines are exhibited in a proper manner. The only end of revealed truth I say again is *duty*. Hence, with Paul, *instructive* preaching was *practical* preaching. So it was with Edwards and Baxter. Both were distinguished for strong powers of argumentation. But their discourses never terminated in speculation; they enforced the practical *duties* of the gospel, by motives drawn from its *doctrines*, and adapted to bear down with a mighty efficacy on the heart and life. In this respect their preaching, both as to its spirit, and its fruits, differed widely from that of *moral* preachers, so called, who labor with no success, to regulate the *external conduct* of their hearers, because they leave out of sight all the fundamental principles of the gospel. A respected English prelate, † in addressing the clergy of the last century, said, “We have long been attempting to reform the nation by *moral* preaching. With what effect?—None. On the contrary, we have dexterously preached the people into downright infidelity. We must change our voice. We must preach Christ and him crucified. Nothing but the *gospel* is the power of God unto salvation.”

3. *That the Christian preacher should aim to render his sermons instructive, is evident from the best EXAMPLES of preaching.*

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\* My Sermon at installation of Rev. D. Oliphant.

† Bishop Lavington.

And here I appeal at once to the great Teacher who came from God, the perfect pattern of all other teachers. When he entered on his ministry, false religions had enveloped the world in darkness. A thousand errors had overspread even the *Jewish* church. His great object was to dissipate these errors, and to enlighten men in the knowledge of true religion. Take his sermon on the mount, for example, and it is a continued series of *instructions*, given on most important subjects. Take the whole current of his public discourses, as recorded by the evangelists, and as the basis of them all, you find the fundamental truths of the gospel inculcated. Among these I can barely mention, without enlargement, the distinct personality, in unity, of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; his own real divinity; the sovereignty of God, and the personal election to eternal life, of those who are effectually called; the doctrine of vicarious atonement, as the only ground of forgiveness; the necessity to all men, of regeneration, by the Spirit of God, on account of their entire moral depravity; the necessity of repentance and faith, as conditions of salvation; the certain perseverance in holiness of all true believers; and the eternal punishment of final unbelievers. As Christ committed nothing to writing himself, one of two things is unquestionable; we must rely with absolute confidence, on the men whom he inspired to preach and to write his gospel,—or we have *no gospel now*. If we do rely on these men, the proof from the Evangelists, the Acts, and the Epistles, that Christ did preach the above doctrines, stands on one and the same footing of authority; and that proof is complete. It is the evidence of testimony; the same by which we know that the Apostles themselves preached the same system of truths. That they did so, you may see in Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost;—in Paul's at Antioch, at Athens, at Corinth; in short, throughout the whole course of their ministrations. The very end for which they were commissioned was to "*teach* all nations," the religion of Christ. And in all subsequent ages, those who have been worthy successors of the Apostles, have



been *instructive* preachers. In short, if the great end of the Christian ministry is to save sinners, by bringing them to embrace the truth, then preachers of every age, who have sought to amuse their hearers, by appeals to the fancy, or to excite them, by appeals to the passions, without *instructing* them in the great truths of the gospel, have utterly failed in their duty, as guides to souls; and are not fit to be reckoned as examples of good preaching. This leads to my next topic of remark;

4. *That the obligation of ministers to be instructive in their sermons, is evident from the best EFFECTS of preaching, in the conversion of sinners.*

It is a fair inference from principles already established, that any system of preaching, which leaves men unacquainted with the vital truths of the gospel, leaves them without hope, and without God in the world. I shall of course be understood to speak of those who are ignorant of the above truths to such a *degree*, as is inconsistent with the exercise of Christian graces; and also of those who have both capacity and opportunity to receive instruction; in distinction from the case of infants and idiots, and perhaps of individual exceptions, which sovereign grace may make among the heathen. But in respect to men of full understanding, in a Christian land, I suppose it is self-evident, that no one can be in a state of salvation, without doing what the gospel requires; and that no one can *do* this, without *knowing* what the gospel requires. Ignorance of the gospel, therefore, to the extent supposed, must be, in such a case, criminal and fatal.

A *human* statute-book, that should professedly tolerate in subjects, a deliberate and voluntary ignorance of its own enactments, would be stamped with absurdity. To suppose then that *God* has given men the *gospel*, with all the requisite means for understanding it correctly, and yet that they may be *innocent or safe* in utter *ignorance* of the truths and duties it reveals, is to suppose that the great Lawgiver trifles with the subjects of his moral government, and encourages them to trample on all its obligations. But wo to that man who, as an ambassador of Christ,

proceeds on such an assumption as this ! While he fails to give his hearers evangelical instruction, the effect of his ministrations is, not to save, but to destroy their souls. Let him look to it, how he shall meet the reckoning that awaits him, in the day of final retribution.

But in this case as in others, the tendency of moral causes, is to be estimated from the effects which they actually produce. On this principle, let the question be, what sort of preaching *does* God most frequently bless to the conversion of sinners ?—and the answer will be found most conclusively, in the history of the church ;—especially in revivals of religion.

On this subject, facts speak a language not to be misunderstood. It has become an inquiry of deep and solemn interest, with British Christians, why the special influences of the Spirit, so often granted to the churches of this country, are not equally enjoyed among themselves. While it becomes us to bow to the sovereignty of that grace, which sanctifies and saves, without too fastidiously attempting to explain its operations, we know that it ordinarily operates by means. A revival of religion is nothing more than the Spirit of God, giving' to the great and peculiar doctrines of the gospel, their proper efficacy on the hearts of men. Why then are not such revivals common in the *British* churches ? I say frankly, that, in my opinion, the great and peculiar doctrines of the gospel are not commonly preached in those churches, in any such manner as is adapted to give them their most appropriate influence on the hearts of men. I say this with no disrespect to the character of British preachers, in or out of the establishment. In this age of Christian enterprise, they have formed the van in the armies of Emanuel, and nobly led the way, in that system of unexampled effort, which promises to usher in the millennial triumph of the church. Whitefield and the Wesleys were raised up to begin a reformation, which has since been carried forward by other instrumentality. But these men were gifted rather as fervent pulpit orators, than as able instructors and guides in the church.

They were not the fixed lights of the firmament, but meteors rather, shot across the heavens, to startle a slumbering world.

If I mistake not, too many British sermons of the last age, and the preceding, have been essentially deficient in respect to *instruction*. To a great extent, they have indeed been evangelical in cast; but there is about them a *generality*; a want of distinctness, and point, and power, in exhibiting the truths of the gospel, denoting a sad declension from the high ground occupied by those "sons of thunder, and sons of consolation," the Howes, and Baxters, and Jeremy Taylors of a former age. Among the living preachers of that country, it is but justice to say that there are many who are eminently pious, and some in whom such piety is associated with talent and eloquence of the first order. But of those few, who have of late years, stood preeminent above the rest in public estimation, I should say, that so far as their printed sermons enable us to judge of their preaching, it is not generally such as we should expect would be followed with a revival of religion. With much that is attractive in style, and even elevated in sentiment, they are, after all, wanting in a full exhibition of Christian doctrines; and especially wanting in that plain, downright *application* of these doctrines to the *consciences* of men, which leaves them without excuse as sinners.

That preaching which represents sin as a woful calamity, and sinners as objects of *compassion*, not of *blame*;—that preaching which does not carry home to the conscience, the charge of personal guilt, and the obligation to immediate repentance, and personal holiness, has no tendency to rouse the soul from its slumber of death. Wherever such preaching prevails, it is a remarkable fact, which cannot be too often stated, that no *genuine* revivals of religion are found. I say *genuine* revivals; for I am well aware that popular excitements, without doctrinal instruction, may be *called* revivals; and that zeal without knowledge may glory in the multiplication of its converts. But such excitements are no blessing to the church. Like the earthquake and the whirlwind they make a mighty concussion, but God is not in them; and when the agitation subsides, all is wreck and

confusion. Anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, prevail, instead of the fruits of the Spirit; youth and ignorance vaunt themselves over age and experience; and finally the ecstasy of fanaticism sinks away into a cold, and often long protracted apathy to all religion. Such revivals are the triumph of infidelity, and the death of piety.

The minister of Christ, whose experience and success, in such seasons, has been greater than that of any other man in modern times, observed to me; "I have seen churches run down by repeated excitements, in which there was *emotion* merely, without *instruction*. In the first stage of a revival," said he, "while depravity is yet ascendant, and conscience asleep, in a congregation, I would preach the law, with its awful sanctions, and its solemn claims on sinners to be holy, and that immediately. But when the first movements of a revival are past, and sinners are settling down on presumptuous confidences, I would *preach election*. Conscience is then roused enough to make a cord, which sinners cannot break. Their own convictions are on my side, so that they cannot escape; and I would hold them fast, and repeat my strokes, under the fire and hammer of divine truth."

President Edwards, in his letter to Dr. Colman, respecting the great revival at Northampton, says; "No discourses have been more remarkably blessed, than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty with regard to answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains of mere natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on. I have never found so much immediate, saving fruit, of any discourses I have offered to my congregation, as some from those words, Rom. III. 19. "that every mouth may be stopped;" endeavoring to show from them that it would be just with God forever to cast off mere natural men."

These remarks doubtless coincide with the experience of pious ministers generally, who have been conversant with revivals. No lasting and salutary effects are to be expected from

excitements, in which stir and noise are substituted for the substantial influence of Christian truth. But they who are converted under a ministry of light, and cordially embrace the gospel, with a full understanding of its doctrines, have a religion that will produce the solid fruits of righteousness, and will abide the day of trial. In this view, I do not scruple to say, for it is my deliberate belief, that, since the Apostles' days, there has been no community, in which the general strain of preaching, for so long a period, to so great an extent, and with so few exceptions, has been as well adapted to promote true religion, as in the evangelical churches of New England. And if I were to name any one preacher from whom a young minister might best learn some of the chief elements of useful sermonizing, that preacher with his many faults of style and manner, would be the elder Edwards. While his taste was vitiated by familiarity with certain great men of the 17th century, especially Owen, (as profound a theologian, but as bad a writer as any age has produced,) his sermons possessed the three grand requisites of good preaching,—weight of matter,—lucid arrangement, and evangelical warmth.

5. *There is one more consideration from which I would urge on ministers the importance of instructive preaching; and that is,* ITS TENDENCY TO PROMOTE THE UNITY AND STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH.

Its tendency is to make a people united in their minister. Personal attachment to a minister, from his hearers, depends on many things, which cannot be noticed here; but it fundamentally depends on their respect to him as their Christian Instructor. The way for a teacher of mere *children*, to stand high in the estimation of his pupils, is to create in them an ardent thirst for knowledge, and then to instruct them. Even animals instinctively gather around him who gives them food; and when “the hungry sheep look up, and are *not fed*,” they have but little regard for their shepherd. If a minister would maintain the respect of his hearers, it is a maxim which I have no fear of repeating too often, ‘whatever else he does or neglects to do, he must *preach well*.’

But the union of a well instructed people, is not mere attachment to their minister; it is grounded on an intelligent coincidence of views, respecting divine truth. Ignorance is the parent of prejudice, and prejudice of mistake, and mistake of misrepresentation. Hence men often dispute fiercely respecting doctrines taught in the pulpit, because they have not even knowledge enough to be instructed. It was in this way, that some of Paul's hearers slanderously reported, and affirmed that *he said*, "Let us do evil that good may come." Ignorance in religion leads to controversy. It makes men sanguine, censorious, querulous. Knowledge leads to candor, sobriety, docility, and I may add, to unity of sentiment. The object of knowledge is truth; and truth, being invariable, is a ground, so far as it is understood, of coincidence in opinion. Let a hundred men be perfectly *instructed*, as to any given truth, whether in mathematics, or history, or religion, and, so far as intellect is concerned, their views of that truth will perfectly coincide. Independently then of any wayward influence from passion and prejudice, which blind the understanding, from the obliquities of the heart, good men will be agreed in religion, just so far as they are thoroughly enlightened. On this ground, it is reasonable to look for doctrinal disputes, and for all the mischiefs, resulting from a controversial spirit, among a people who have either no religious instruction, or only such as is essentially incompetent; and equally reasonable to look for harmony of views, under the ministrations of an able and faithful pastor.

It is on this ground too, that we may look for *strength* in a church. Why must a divided church be a feeble one? Because among its members, there is not only a want of cooperation, but there is counteraction. Division is always weakness; but the converse is not so invariably true. When we say that union is strength, meaning *moral* strength, we refer to a union predicated on *knowledge*. Superstition may multiply its votaries, without any substantial accession to its moral power. The plague in London, that spread death through the streets of that great and guilty metropolis;—the earthquake in Syria, that

shook down towers and battlements, and buried thousands under the ruins of their own habitations, brought multitudes to their knees, to beg for mercy, who were unaccustomed to pray; and crowded the churches with trembling suppliants, who sought a refuge from the pangs of conscience. These spontaneous movements of the multitude, however general, were but the impulse of a superstitious terror, resulting from no intelligent views of duty, and adding nothing to the general amount of piety.

Bigotry builds its faith, not on evidence, but on authority or accident. It believes without condescending to *tell* the reason why, or presuming to *know* the reason. Such is the condition of the uninformed multitude, in Catholic countries; but here too, union is not strength. The motley host of Midian and Amalek could not stand before Gideon, with his little, chosen band. An army of Philistines were routed by one Samson. One Luther and one Pascal, with the mighty resources of argument, which they wielded, were more than a match, in moral power, for millions, debased by the ignorance and vassalage of Romish bigotry.

But in any community, where union in religious belief is founded on *knowledge*, it *is* strength. Christians, in such a case, can give a reason of their faith and hope. Instead of implicit confidence in some human oracle, or in some system of hereditary belief, like the noble Bereans, they search the scriptures. Hence, in times of trial, they are “stedfast and unmovable,” like *men*; and not “like *children*, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.” Such Christians were the fathers of the New England churches. Their solid piety, grounded on an intelligent belief of evangelical doctrines, was a burning and shining light to the world around them. Such, I rejoice to say, have been their successors, in many of these churches, to this day. I could point to honorable examples of churches, thoroughly taught the great truths of the Bible, who have stood the assaults of error, in its most imposing forms;—stood, shoulder to shoulder, like an army with banners, and

maintained unbroken ranks, while the fiercest onset, from the enemies of truth, could not shake their faith.

I could point to mournful examples of an opposite character, —where a church has been so unfortunate, as to live under a pastor, who did but half preach the gospel; and when that pastor died, perhaps even in his life, has become a prey to grievous wolves, entering in to devour the flock. Bitter animosities and ruinous divisions have arisen, till a minority of the church have been compelled to withdraw from the sanctuary of their fathers, and set up the standard of the gospel in another place.

The origin of these mischiefs, by which our churches of late have been so extensively threatened, lies at the door of ministers, who have failed to preach the grand truths of the gospel; not indeed themselves preaching *error*, but preparing the way for *others* to inculcate Unitarian and Universalist heresies, with a fatal success. Thirty years ago, if I mistake not, the capital truths of religion were preached, much more frequently, and more distinctly than now. The fact, if it is one, deserves the solemn attention of ministers. But as I cannot proceed with this branch of the subject here, I shall resume it in a subsequent Lecture.



## LECTURE XX.

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### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

On the general requisites to render preaching *instructive*, and the reasons why it ought to be so, I have purposely dwelt, at considerable length. So fundamental, however, to the work of the Christian preacher, is the duty of communicating instruction, that the discussion on which I am next to enter, will exhibit, not so much a distinct subject, as an amplification of the foregoing, or a presentation of it under different aspects.

*I proceed then to a THIRD general characteristic required in a sermon, namely, DIRECTNESS.* My meaning is, that it should be *explicit*, both in doctrine and execution. It has been well said, that, "A man who walks directly, though slowly, towards his journey's end, will reach it sooner than his neighbor, who runs into every crooked turning, or loiters to gaze at trifles, or to gather flowers by the way-side."

A gentleman of my acquaintance, who went to the Chapel of the Rev. Rowland Hill, in London, though he could not

reach the interior of the house, on account of the crowd, but listened to the sermon through a window, said that he felt but one predominant impression, during the whole, namely, "He preaches to me." How was this impression produced? The preacher of Surrey Chapel has been distinguished for the habit of seizing some prominent point of religious truth, holding it up in a clear light, steadily fixing on it the minds of his hearers, and then applying it to their consciences. He is a *direct* preacher.

I will consider what constitutes directness in preaching, and then enquire why preaching so often fails of possessing this character.

I. WHAT CONSTITUTES DIRECTNESS IN PREACHING? *It consists in such an exhibition of a subject, that the hearers not only understand it, BUT PERCEIVE IT TO BE PERTINENT AND IMPORTANT TO THEMSELVES.*

If I were to address a mixed assembly, on some abstruse topic in philosophy, like the English preacher, who delivered a sermon on the *science of optics*, would a plain hearer feel any reason to say, "He preaches to me?" Or if I were to speak in *Latin*, though the truths uttered were ever so simple and solemn, would that hearer say, "He preaches to me?" If a child were to hear a learned discussion of some recondite subject in metaphysics, would he suppose that discourse designed for himself? In any such case, how could a hearer feel *himself* to be addressed, when he knows, and supposes the preacher to know, that he is incapable of comprehending one sentence, that is uttered?

If I stretch my hand towards a man at a distance, no sensation is produced in him by the movement, for I have not reached him. But if I approach him, and lay my hand on him, he instantly perceives that he is touched. So if I only preach *towards* a man, without reaching him, he feels nothing; but if I bring divine truth into direct contact with his mind, he instantly feels the contact. He is a complex being. He has an understanding, has a conscience, has passions. If the sermon bears on his understanding, he feels it; if it bears on his con-

science, he feels it ; if it bears on his passions, he feels it. Of course, if it does not touch him any where, he has no spontaneous feeling that it was meant for him.

Now, in some important respects, all men are alike. In strength and cultivation of intellect there is indeed, great disparity ; but every man has a conscience, emotions, passions. A painting on canvass of one *face*, would not be an exact likeness of any other face ; but a painting, in language, of one *heart*, is substantially a likeness of *every other* heart. A hundred men, therefore, under the same sermon, may each one feel, that it is as well adapted to his own case, as though it were designed for him only. But a sermon to produce this impression, must do two things ; it must clearly present to the hearers some subject, which they see to be true and important ; and show them its adaptation to their own case. My meaning may be illustrated by examples.

*Christ was a direct preacher.* It was just in the way above described, that the humbling truths contained in his sermon at Nazareth, roused the prejudices of the hearers, so that they were “ filled with wrath ; ” and that his parable of the vineyard, in another case, made the Jews angry, when “ they perceived that he had spoken the parable against them.” How did they *know* that he meant them ? He had not *named* them ; had not preferred any accusation against them. Yet he *did* mean them ; and purposely drew such a representation, that their consciences could not fail of making the application to their own case. Christ knew what was in man. He compelled his hearers to feel, that, with the eye of omniscience, he looked directly into every bosom, and saw what was passing there. It was impossible that they should not feel thus, when he answered, as he often did, to their “ inward thoughts,” while those thoughts had not been expressed at all in words. Hence it was that the woman of Samaria said to her friends, “ come see a man, who told me all things that ever I did.” Hence the men who brought to Christ a woman, alleging against her a heavy, criminal accusation, were struck dumb with confusion, by a direct appeal to their own bosoms ; “ He that is without sin among

you, let him first cast a stone at her." Silently they withdrew, one by one, being "convinced by their own conscience."

Hence also, the young man who was very rich, and who came to Christ enquiring, what shall I do, that I may inherit eternal life, was thrown into agitation by the simple reply, "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come follow me." Nor was this a random stroke; for the bolt was directed with unerring aim, to smite down the reigning idol of his heart. Nay this great Teacher from God, sometimes assailed his hearers, by forms of address, still more explicit and direct, than any that I have mentioned; "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites;—Ye serpents!—ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell." So he sometimes directly applied the language of consolation; "Son, be of good cheer." "Daughter, go in peace."

Nothing short of omniscience, or at least inspiration, could authorize any one to use this sort of directness in addressing men. But still, every preacher of good common sense, and tolerable acquaintance with human character, may, if he chooses to do so, find direct access to the hearts of his hearers. To this principle I have before adverted, when considering the *conclusion of sermons*, by showing how the agency of *conscience* is to be employed, in making the application of divine truth. It was involved too, in discussing the special interest excited by that preaching which is strictly evangelical, in distinction from that which is not. The principle implies, you will observe, that while no individual designation is made by the preacher, the exhibition of truth is so skilfully adapted to the hearer, that he feels *himself* to be as really addressed, as though he were called by name.

One more illustration of my meaning will be sufficient. *Whitefield was a direct preacher.* The look of his eye, and the pointing of his finger, while some awful truth of the Bible was uttered, often thrilled through a thousand hearts at once, like a stroke of lightning. Suppose yourself to have been one among a crowded audience, listening to a sermon from him, on the

*omnipresence of God.* The subject is a general one, yet its exhibition is such, that the truth comes home to each hearer, with a solemn intensity and individuality, from which there is no escape. "God sees me," is the one, all-absorbing thought of each mind. As the sermon proceeds, it tears away every covering, and demolishes every refuge of sin. The adulterer, who locked his door, and "waited for the twilight, saying, no eye shall see me," trembles, when he comes to feel that *God was there*. The thief, who said, "surely the darkness shall cover me," trembles when he comes to think of that omniscient eye, which beheld the deed of guilt; and to hear that voice which seems to echo from the Judgment seat, "Can any hide himself in secret, that I shall not see him?" The man who defrauded his neighbor by direct falsehood or skilful deception; the hypocrite, who assumed the mask of religion, to further his purposes of iniquity; the votary of avarice, ambition or sensuality, who supposed that the lurking abominations of his heart were known only to himself; each of these as the preacher goes on to exhibit an omnipresent, heart-searching God, finds himself stripped of all disguise, and standing naked amid the all-pervading light of truth. Nay, before the sermon is finished, the summons of the last trump sounds in his ears; he is arraigned at the bar of God; the books are opened; the secrets of all hearts are revealed; the righteous are adjudged to everlasting life, and the wicked to shame and everlasting contempt.

Why is it that under a sermon, skilfully conducted, on this *general* subject, every hearer, who has a conscience, feels the hand of the preacher, pressing heavily on *himself*? Just because the *subject* is one, not of empty speculation, but of awful and universal interest; and because the truth is so exhibited, that every one must feel its adaptation to his *own* case. This is *directness* in preaching.

The way is now prepared to inquire in the

II. *Place, what are the CAUSES which produce THE INDEFINITE AND INDIRECT sort of preaching.*

Among these causes, I would reckon the following.

## I. WANT OF INTELLECTUAL PRECISION IN THE SPEAKER.

When the *native structure* of a man's mind is so heavy, as to impart a character of imbecility to its movements, a correspondent indistinctness attends all his mental operations. As the sun behind a cloud, is to be seen but occasionally and obscurely, so the thoughts of this man are wanting in distinctness and vividness of impression.

Or the difficulty may lie in the *habits* of his mind, when there is no fault in its structure. If he has not been accustomed to systematic thinking ; or if he undertakes to discuss a particular subject, to which he has given no time for reading and reflection, his sermon, as a copy of his own mind, will convey no distinct instruction to the minds of others.

Such a preacher will make no thorough discrimination of characters. He will deal in *general* positions, which all perhaps will admit to be true, but which no one will appropriate to himself. Suppose he makes the broad statement, *that all men are sinners*, and does this clearly. Not one of his hearers, perhaps, disputes this ; and yet not one *applies it to his own character*. The sermon may go still further, and divide the hearers into two general classes, saints and sinners, and yet lead no one to make the solemn enquiry, "To which class do I belong?" A single colour of the painter, indiscriminately spread over canvass, may be very proper for certain purposes, but no one mistakes such a painting for the likeness of a human being. So the sermon that consists of generalities, without any exact delineation of character, awakens no vivid interest ; it leads no hearer to say, "*that means me.*"

But suppose farther, that the preacher, besides the *general* classification of his hearers into saints and sinners, goes on to show that the former will be happy and the latter miserable ; while he makes no intelligible discrimination between the two classes ; will any conscience be disturbed by that sermon? The grand enquiry remains,—*what is a saint?—what is a sinner?* To say that one loves God, and the other does not, is a true answer, but too general. Among real Christians there is

great diversity of character, arising from diversity of *doctrinal views, intellectual temperament, attainments and habits*. One is inclined to ultra-Calvinism, another to the opposite extreme. One is strong and clear, in his reasoning powers, another feeble and obscure. One has made much advance in knowledge, another little. One is judicious, another indiscreet; one ardent, another phlegmatic; one gentle, another austere; one scrupulous, another sanguine and rash.

And there is a corresponding difference in *spiritual characteristics*. One is a fervent, watchful Christian; another lukewarm and negligent. One is cheerful, another melancholy; one growing, another declining; One looks only at the state of the heart,—another is strenuous for names and forms; one has too much a religion of opinion, another too much a religion of passion; one carries to extreme, his conformity to the world,—another his seclusion and austerity.

Among *unconverted sinners* too we find great diversity. To one the influence of instruction and example in childhood has been salutary, to another pernicious; one has been trained up in the school of Christ, another in the school of Satan; one is orthodox in belief, another skeptical; one is solemn and anxious, another a careless neglecter, or hardened despiser of religion; one is addicted to prodigality, another to parsimony; one to an ostentatious gaiety and grossness of sinful indulgence, another to sullen and solitary wickedness.

But the indefinite preaching which I condemn *amalgamates* all inpenitent men, under one sweeping term *sinners*, without any adaptation of truth to the great *variety* existing among these as to age, temper, intellect, knowledge, and convictions. It may undertake to describe the character of a sinner, and draw the picture of a demon; or on the other extreme, may represent this sinner as possessing a great preponderance of moral excellences.

Let the same preacher attempt to describe a saint, by exhibiting the separate graces of the Christian character, and here too, all is loose and declamatory. Does he speak of religious joy? it is ecstasy; of contrition?—it is melancholy; of deadness to

the world ?—it is monkish austerity ; of submission ?—it is stoical apathy, as to temporal calamities, and as to spiritual, it is an arbitrary test of character, which puts asunder what God has joined together, holiness and heaven. Every delineation of a true Christian, which he attempts, is overdrawn. The standard of duty he confounds with the measure of actual attainment ; and thus makes sanctification, as it exists in this life, to imply perfect conformity to God. He paints a Christian ; and it is the likeness of an angel, rather than that of any imperfect son or daughter of Adam. No real saint, certainly, would presume to apply the character to himself.

Now all this confusion in sermons, may arise from want of clear, accurate habits of thinking in the preacher.



## LECTURE XXI.

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### CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

2. *Indefinite preaching may arise in part, from FALSE TASTE IN THE PREACHER.*

Under the foregoing head, I referred to want of logical exactness; here I refer to deficiency in rhetorical skill. The former fault lies in the *thought*, the latter in the *expression*. Paul says,—“ And even things without life, giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a *distinction* in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the *trumpet* give an *uncertain* sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue, words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them are without signification. Therefore, if I know not the *meaning* of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh, a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me.”

It is by no means my intention here to consider those vari-

ous qualities of style, which contribute to perspicuity ; nor yet to show how strength is injured, by needless accumulation of words, and complexity of structure. My object is rather to exhibit that *generality* in the choice of terms, and the formation of sentences, which is the opposite of simplicity and directness in style. This may result from a habit, unconsciously contracted by reading some writer of imposing celebrity, who has many redeeming excellencies, amid great faults. Or it may arise from a designed and affected *imitation* of such a writer. The fault may be that the sentences of this writer are too *periodic*, the members being accumulated to excess, and artificially adjusted to the purpose of rotundity and cadence. Or they may be too much constructed on the principle of the *loose sentence*, in which one thought after another, is hung on by way of appendage to the principal thought, so as to form one long, obscure sentence, out of materials sufficient to constitute five or ten sentences.\*

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\* To elucidate my meaning, it may be proper to give an example, from writers of high reputation, showing to what kind of sentences I allude.

1. *The periodic sentence*,—(from JOHNSON'S RAMBLER.)

“As every step in the progression of existence changes our position with respect to the things about us, so as to lay us open to new assaults and particular dangers, and subjects us to inconveniences from which any other situation is exempt;—as a public or a private life, youth and age, wealth and poverty, have all some evil closely adherent, which cannot wholly be escaped, but by quitting the state to which it is annexed, and submitting to the incumbrances of some other condition;—so it cannot be denied that every difference in the structure of the mind has its advantages and its wants; and that failings and defects being inseparable from humanity, however the powers of understanding be extended or contracted, there will, on one side or the other, always be an avenue to error and miscarriage.”

Here is a sentence of twelve lines, so elaborate in its formation, as not to be at all a model for purposes of popular address.

2 *Example. The loose sentence*.—(from CHALMERS.) “We ask you to collect all the scattered remnants of what is great, and what is graceful in accomplishments, that may have survived the fall of our first parents; and we pronounce of the whole assemblage, that they go not to alleviate by one iota, the burden of that controversy which lies between God and their posterity; that through all the ranks and

But aside from rhetorical structure, there is a kind of indefinite style, which may be called a *factitious simplicity*, in

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diversities of character which prevail in the world, there is one pervading affection of enmity to him ;—that the man of talents forgets that that he has nothing he did not receive, and so, courting by some lofty enterprise of mind, the gaze of this world's admiration, he renounces his God, and makes an idol of his fame ;—that the man of ambition feels not how subordinate he is to the might and majesty of his Creator, but turning away all his reverence from him, falls down to the idol of power ;—that the man of avarice withdraws all his trust from the living God, and, embarking all his desire in the pursuit of riches, and all his security in the possession of them, he makes an idol of wealth ;—that, descending from these to the average and the everyday members of our world's population, we see each walking after the counsel of his own heart, and the sight of his own eyes, with every wish directed to the objects of time, and every hope bounded by its anticipations ; and amid all the love they bear to their families, and all the diligence they give to their business, and all the homage of praise and attachment they obtain from their friends, are they so surrounded by the influences of what is seen and sensible, that the invisible God is scarcely ever thought of, and his character not at all dwelt on with delight, and his will never admitted to an habitual and practical ascendancy over their conduct, so as to make it true of all and of every one of us, that there is none who understandeth, and none who seeketh after God."

Here again, we have one protracted sentence, of twenty-nine printed lines, with such accumulation of members, that it needs to be *studied*, before the connexion of its parts can be fully perceived. This undue length, however, is less likely to occasion obscurity, in the loose sentence, than in the periodic, because in the former, that word or two, which is a key to the whole sense, comes out at the *beginning*, while in the latter, it is reserved to the *close*. But, in both cases, the structure is too elaborate for popular impression.

3 *Example. Simple and direct style ;—*(from BAXTER.) "To preach a sermon, I think is not the hardest part of our work ; and yet what skill is necessary to make plain the truth, to convince the hearers, to let irresistible light in to the consciences, and keep it there. It is a lamentable case, that, in a message from the God of heaven, of everlasting consequence to the souls of men, we should behave ourselves so, as that the whole business should *miscarry* in our hands. How often have carnal hearers gone jeering home at the palpable and dishonorable failings of the *preacher*? How many sleep under us, because our hearts and tongues are sleepy ; and we bring not with us skill and zeal enough to awaken them? Brethren, do you not shrink and tremble, under a sense of the greatness of your work? Will a *common* measure of ability and prudence serve for such a task as

which the terms employed are all intelligible, and well arranged, but so *general* as to cast an air of obscurity over the meaning. Examples of this sort abound in the published discourses of Dr. Chalmers, who, by the fascinations of his genius, his high reputation, and the drapery of peculiar diction in which he clothes his thoughts, is more likely to vitiate, by his influence, the style of young preachers, than any other living model.

With much less of real talent than Chalmers, Irving has studiously copied the worst faults of that writer, besides being prolific in faults of his own. The same thoughts which Baxter would have expressed with unstudied brevity and directness, both these preachers express by a periphrastic generality. For example,—the former would say, perhaps, of two men, that “they were intimate friends,”—the latter would say “they were united in the affectionateness of intimate companionship.” The former would describe “the believer’s conquest, by conformity to God;” the latter would describe “the overcoming of his passions, by the attemperment of his affections to the divine image.” The former would say, “This is the character of all men;” the latter, “this is the character of the world’s population.” The former would say, “sincerity,”—the latter, “incorruptible truthfulness;”—the former, “he was indignant,”—the

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yours? *Necessity* may indeed cause the church to tolerate the weak; but wo to us if we tolerate our *own* weakness.

Say, brethren, in the fear of God, do you regard the success of your labors, and wish to see it upon the souls of your hearers, or do you not? If you do not, why do you study and preach, and call yourselves the ministers of Christ? If you do, surely you cannot easily be induced to spoil your own work. While men have eyes, as well as ears, they will think they *see* your meaning as well as *hear* it; and they are much more ready to believe what they see than what they hear. It greatly prevents our success, that *other men* are all the week contradicting to the people in private, what we have been speaking from the word of God in public; but it will prevent it much more, if we contradict *ourselves*; if our actions give our words the lie.”

The chief object of these examples is to show, that as to its effect on the minds of hearers, the artificial manner of forming sentences is feeble, compared with that which is direct and simple.

latter, "a feeling of indignancy came over him;" the former, "his heart was stung with remorse,"—the latter, "with unutterable painfulness, the feeling of remorse came over him."

There is, it must be confessed, in the fault I am describing, an apparent aim to depart from the customary phraseology of the best writers; but affectation of peculiarity is not the main difficulty. Instead of a clear, terse, compact style, there is, in the formation of sentences, a loose *generality*, as to words and members. Instead of a meaning, specific and obvious, so expressed that you see instantly and exactly what it is, you see it *indistinctly*, as you see the moon through a dense mist.

Would the time permit, I might properly apply the foregoing principles to the use of *figures* in style, the purpose of which is often frustrated by indistinctness. The painter would deserve little credit, who should draw the likeness of a man, so as not to be distinguishable from that of an elephant. In *language*, it is a maxim of universal application, that vivacity of impression depends on the precision and speciality of the terms employed. Change Milton's description of Satan's shield, which "hung on his shoulders like the *moon*," to this form, "it hung on his shoulders like a *luminous body*," and the figure is ruined. And the bold comparison of the prophet, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs," would be divested entirely of its picturesque character, if transformed into, "they moved like animals." A figure may be so *general* as to express no resemblance to any thing, and therefore be much less intensive than a plain word.

Such are the ways in which the preacher, through bad taste, may be so indefinite in phraseology, that, while his sentiments and spirit are altogether good, he may make no distinct impression on his hearers.

3. *Indefinite preaching may arise from CONSTITUTIONAL DELICACY OF TEMPERAMENT IN THE PREACHER.* He may be wanting in boldness, to utter sentiments which he believes to be true and important.

There is, I am aware, a spurious boldness which is neither

conducive to the usefulness of a Christian preacher, nor creditable in any respect to his character. There is a courage which consists in *rashness*, which pushes on at random, without regard to time, or place, or occasion; which sets at defiance the rules of discretion, and often of decorum. Sometimes it is mere *rusticity*, which falls on the most offensive manner of doing and saying things, from ignorance of what is becoming. Sometimes it is an *affected fidelity*, which *chooses to give offence*; and makes a merit of provoking hostility to the truth, by the form of its exhibition. Sometimes it is native *asperity* or *obstinacy*, which regards all respect for the feelings of others, and all kindness of manner, as pusillanimity. A man of this description may be a very lucid and direct, and yet a very *unprofitable preacher*; for it may be easy to understand him, but hard to love him, or to love the truth, which he clothes with so repulsive an aspect.

But there is another extreme. The preacher, through an amiable delicacy of temper, may shrink from the explicit declaration of truths, which he apprehends would awaken inquietude in his hearers. He is reluctant to inflict *pain* on others.

Perhaps no better illustration of this point can be given, than that which is found in the late Bishop Porteus, a man admitted by all to have been one of the brightest ornaments of the English church. While he doubtless believed all the great truths of the gospel, he too much submerged them in the generalities of a popular theology, so that a distinct recognition of them will rarely be found in the perusal of his discourses. He dwelt on the wisdom, the duty, the satisfaction of a religious life, where a direct preacher would have said, "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord."

A very candid and able reviewer of his life in the Christian Observer says; "He supposed too much in his hearers, the existence of the qualities which the Bible labors to beget. He spoke commonly in *general* terms; dealt much in the *impersonal verb*, much in the *third person*. The man of mild temper will naturally, in addressing an audience, take refuge in general

terms, abstract truths, impersonal verbs, third persons, and the mixture of general applause to the mass, with the measured condemnation of individuals. Nevertheless, such mildness has no prototype in the scriptures ; nor is it consonant to the dictates of enlightened humanity. We do not warn the man whose house is on fire, by the abstract assurance that “ fire is dangerous ; ” by introducing a third person, and saying “ *he* is in danger ; ”—by adverting to those noble public institutions, the fire insurance companies. Nor must the delegated apostle of Christianity fail to discriminate, to individualize, to strike home, to draw the line betwixt the form and spirit of religion ; to show that the best church cannot of itself sanctify those who enter it ; “ to speak,” as old Baxter says, “ like a dying man to dying men ; to warn, rebuke, exhort,” like one who expects to meet his congregation next at the bar of God.”

As it was with this distinguished prelate, so it doubtless is, in many other cases. A good degree of correct belief, and zeal, and spirituality may exist in the preacher, and yet his sermons may fail to make any distinct impression, through an excess of kindness, or an over-wrought sensibility, which dreads to inflict pain, by a direct and pointed exhibition of truth.

4. *Indefinite preaching may arise from the “ ABSOLUTE WANT OF PIETY, OR FROM A LOW STATE OF PIETY, in the preacher.* In the latter case, while his personal religion is barely sufficient to secure his own salvation, his preaching will do little to promote the salvation of his hearers. The man whose governing principle is *love to Christ*, and who solemnly believes that his hearers must repent or perish, will speak in demonstration of the Spirit and with power, because he *means to be understood*.

But suppose the man to be influenced by supreme love to *himself*,—how will he preach? Perhaps he entered the ministry as a *mere profession*, to gain his living by it. Will he then incur the risk of alienating his hearers, and losing his place, and his income, by an explicit declaration of divine truth ; No,—he does not *mean* to preach the gospel, so as to be understood.

Perhaps he is ambitious of distinction, as a man of learning and taste. Among his hearers, he numbers families, wealthy, polite, intelligent, fastidious ;—whose refined sensibilities would be shocked, at the faithful portrait of their own character as sinners, and the awful retribution that awaits them hereafter. Something of Christian truth they are willing to hear from the pulpit, if it is adapted to their fancy, by elegance of costume, and makes no stirring appeal to their conscience. But can the man whose chief object is popular applause, be expected to sacrifice the favor of these worldly hearers, by preaching the gospel, in a manner so direct, as to be profitable to the poor and ignorant? It is no part of his *design* to carry the truth home with power to the conscience ;—he does not *mean* to be understood.

A man who wishes to impress on other minds that which deeply interests his own, will easily find words suited to his purpose. Does the starving beggar address you with studied amplification, so as to leave you in doubt as to his object? He comes to the point at once, and asks for *bread*. Does the general, in the heat of battle, when all is at stake on a single charge, seek out the recondite terms of philosophy, or the embellishments of rhetoric, in addressing his army? No, his language is brief and direct ;—“ On, comrades, on ! ” Just so the preacher, who firmly believes the message of the gospel, and solemnly feels its everlasting importance to his hearers, will deliver this message *plainly*, like a man in earnest. So did John the Baptist. He knew that his life was in danger, from the sanguinary temper of Herod. But he was charged from heaven with a message of rebuke, to that guilty man, and he did not scruple to deliver it. When John preached *generally*, Herod “ heard him gladly ; ” but when the fearless stroke was aimed at the conscience of that licentious king, “ it is not lawful for thee to have thy brother’s wife,” he beheaded the preacher.

Let love to *God* and to *souls*, and the solemn anticipation of meeting his hearers at the judgment, be predominant in a man’s heart, and this will strip off from his sermons, all the dra-



pery of concealment, and artificial ornament, and lead him to a plain, downright, searching exhibition of divine truth, which will make his hearers' hearts burn within them.

But let the love of *himself* be the ruling principle, and this will probably give to his preaching some of those forms of generality, which will frustrate all its salutary effects. Perhaps it will transmute what should be a Christian sermon, into a frigid essay. The course of thought, with the careful avoidance of all divisions, or obvious arrangement of any sort, flows on in the uninterrupted succession of sentences, constructed perhaps by the nicest rules of art; but when the discourse is ended, nothing is proved; no conviction, no light, no excitement is given, or was meant to be given to any mind. Hence it is, that outrageously immoral men often listen to such exhibitions from the pulpit, with no inquietude; or if any throb of conscience is felt, retiring from the sanctuary, they forget what manner of persons they are. A general approbation of what is right, or condemnation of what is wrong, may have been awakened, but it is all as the parable of Nathan to David would have been, without the application, "Thou art the man."

Preachers, defective in piety, may use evangelical terms, as *sin, repentance, atonement, sanctification*, and yet preach no single doctrine of the gospel clearly. They often adopt a phraseology, so guarded and general, as not to disturb the most fastidious contemner of the gospel. Where Christ would say, "He that believeth not shall be damned,"—they speak of the "sanctions of Christianity." Where this divine Teacher would say, "Ye must be born again,"—they inculcate the "importance of moral reformation." Where Paul would say, "The carnal mind is enmity against God," they speak of "the lapsed state of man." Where he would inculcate "holiness,"—they descant on "the moral fitness of things, and the beauty of virtue." Nay, in the act of quoting this apostle, a fastidious preacher of this sort polished away the roughness on the inspired text, "Make your calling and *election* sure," by rendering it, "Make your calling and *salvation* sure."

Such sermons have no tendency to instruct the ignorant, nor to alarm the careless, nor to accomplish any one purpose of Christian preaching. The advocate who should speak to a jury, in language so indefinite, as purposely to make no distinct impression on their minds, while his client is on trial for his life, would scarcely be employed again, in any cause of magnitude. The physician, who should seem to believe that there is no such thing as dangerous disease among men ; or who should barely talk of the benefits of health, to one in a burning fever : or prescribe some palliative to a man in the consumption, and the same to a man in the dropsy, would be thought, as Baxter says, “a sort of civil murderer.”

Why then should he who ministers to souls, trifle with his sacred charge ? Why speak *obscurely*, when the truth to be uttered, is *clear as the light of heaven*, and the motives to *declare it plainly*, are *momentous as eternity* ?

## LECTURE XXII.

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### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SERMONS.

There remains one more topic, under the general head of indefinite preaching, which it seems necessary to expand, so much as to make it the chief subject of the present lecture. I proceed then to say,

5. *That indefinite preaching may arise from WRONG THEORY IN THE PREACHER, AS TO THE BEST MODE OF EXHIBITING DIVINE TRUTH.*

This may occur perhaps in a given case, not because there is any obvious deficiency of taste, or discrimination, or boldness, or piety, in the dispenser of the sacred oracles; but because he honestly believes, that men are less likely to be converted, under a direct and explicit declaration of Christian doctrines, than under one that is more cautious and qualified.

The principle assumed, to express it briefly, is this; that religious truth, to produce any saving effect on men, must operate according to the philosophy of the human mind; and that to exhibit this truth in such a manner that the effect is to awaken opposition in the hearers, is of course to harden their hearts, and confirm them in impenitence. The assumption is, in other words,

that men are predisposed to embrace the truth, if it is skilfully exhibited; and that when they are excited to feelings of opposition, this must be owing to some fault in the preacher. After the remarks which I have already made on that point, no one will understand me as justifying a studied repulsiveness of manner in the pulpit. But I regard the theory just mentioned, though it is embraced by some good and able preachers, as wrong in principle, and as inconsistent both with the Bible and facts.

Fully to show this, might lead to a discussion more extended than is consistent with my present object, which is to suggest only those thoughts that have a direct bearing on the point in hand.

*In the first place, the Bible represents unsanctified men as predisposed, NOT TO RECEIVE AND LOVE THE TRUTH, BUT TO HATE AND OPPOSE IT.* Every such man is an enemy to God. In proof of this I will cite but one text, as a specimen of the concurrent testimony of the sacred oracles; "The carnal mind is enmity against God." To say that this refers only to Jews or to men of one age, is to trifle with the plain import of language; for it clearly applies to men universally, of all ages. Hence a special regeneration by the Holy Spirit, is also taught in the Bible, as universally necessary to qualify men for heaven; because by nature they have no holiness, and never would have any, if left to themselves.

Every such man loves *himself* supremely, and is therefore opposed to the law, which requires him to love God supremely. He loves sin, and is therefore opposed to the law, which requires him to be holy, and threatens him with death, for every transgression. He loves tranquillity in his unbelief, and is therefore opposed to the alarming denunciation of the gospel, "he that believeth not shall be damned." He is proud; and therefore is opposed to that whole system of truth, by which "the loftiness of men is bowed down, and the haughtiness of men is made low, and the Lord alone is exalted." Accordingly this system of truths, especially the doctrine of personal

election, and the sovereignty of divine grace, when not disguised, or explained away by preachers, has been, like the sect of the Nazarenes, "every where spoken against." And can it be, notwithstanding all this evidence as to the native temper of the human heart, that it is predisposed to love the gospel, if properly exhibited? and that all its opposition to the truth, arises from the preacher's want of skill in presenting the system of Christian doctrines, according to the laws of intellectual philosophy?

*In the SECOND place, such a theory of preaching HAS NO COUNTENANCE FROM THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF CHRIST.* He did not represent men as predisposed to love God, so soon as they should see his *true* character, for this true character was the very thing which they *hated*. "Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father." "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness, rather than light." When hatred arises from intellectual misapprehension, light will remove it; when it arises from the state of the heart, light will increase it. I mean that while the heart hates the true character of God, clearer views of that character do not produce love, but more hatred. If the opposition of sinners to God were only an intellectual mistake, if it were only opposition to a *false* character of God, it could not be criminal, for every false character of God *ought* to be opposed. But the difficulty with sinners in Isaiah's time, was not an intellectual one; "A deceived *heart* turned them aside." Just so it was in the time of Christ. If his hearers only needed to have the truth skilfully set before them, to love it, why did they often bitterly complain, under his sermons? Did not Christ know how to preach his own gospel? Was it want of acquaintance with the human heart, or of skill in adapting his instructions to the real condition of men, which led him so to exhibit the doctrine of divine sovereignty at Nazareth, that "the whole synagogue were filled with indignation?" Suppose that this great Teacher had conformed to the theory that the gospel must be so preached, as not to be repulsive to depraved hearts, the

scornful and malignant opposition that was waged against him, he would indeed have escaped. Why? Just because he would have given men a system of religion, at once adapted to please their pride, and to leave them without remedy and without hope in their alienation from God. He knew that the only way to save lost sinners, was to show them that they were lost; and to make them feel their awful guilt and danger. But this he could not do, without disturbing the enmity of their carnal minds.

*In the THIRD place, the theory that the gospel, when properly preached, finds the unsanctified heart predisposed to embrace it, IS CONTRARY TO THE GENERAL EVIDENCE OF FACTS.*

From the ministry of its divine Founder to the present time, the gospel has fought its way, against the pride, and prejudice, and unbelief of this same human heart, arrayed in a thousand forms of inveterate hostility to oppose its progress. Indeed, that this religion, in its primitive purity, should have maintained an *existence* on earth, in the face of so much opposition, and notwithstanding so many motives operating on its teachers to disguise its truths, and neutralize its character, is owing merely to the shield of omnipotence, interposed for its protection.

To the maxim then,—*that to repel the human heart is not the way to convert it, I reply by another maxim;—that to appease the enmity of the heart, by accommodating the gospel to its taste, is not the way to convert it; but is the direct way to frustrate the saving influence of divine truth, and to fix men in hopeless rejection of it.* Paradox as it may seem to unbelief, it ought to be no mystery to the Christian teacher, that those searching, humbling truths, which inflict agony on the sinner's conscience, are the only means of his deliverance from spiritual death. So thought the great physician of souls. To those diseased with sin, he did not scruple to administer bitter medicines. And shall we imagine *ourselves* more merciful and skilful than *Christ*, while we leave untouched the deadly malady of

the soul, because we choose to accommodate our prescriptions to the wishes of those who are utterly ignorant of their disease as sinners, and of the only remedy provided in the gospel?

Suppose that Paul, when he was going to Corinth, could have been addressed by some adept in intellectual philosophy, and told, "it is preposterous for you to preach the doctrine of Christ crucified, in that refined city. This doctrine is 'to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.'" He would have said,—'I know it, but this same doctrine is, notwithstanding, the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation. Your maxim of modifying the gospel, lest it should *repel* the sinful heart, would bind over the world to despair.'

Suppose you were called to devise the best method of converting *infidels* to Christianity ;—would you present it to them as it came from Christ? or as accommodated by a philosophical theory to their prejudices? Priestly tried this latter experiment,—fully expecting that Jews and philosophical unbelievers would embrace what he called a *rational* Christianity. What was the result? The Jews believed, not that Christianity is true, but that Priestly was no consistent Christian. And he, very candidly acknowledging the disappointment of his own hopes, said ; "I do not know that my book has converted a single unbeliever."

Or suppose you were sent as a missionary to the heathen ; would you modify the gospel, so that they might think it coincident with their own superstitions? That they might be induced to take on them the Christian name, would you amalgamate their faith with yours? This experiment too, has been tried. The Romish missionaries in China, acting on the genuine theory of their master Loyola, carried out the plan of converting the heathen by accommodation. "They gave up the main things in which Christians and heathens had been accustomed to differ, and allowed the Chinese every favorite species of idolatry. The consequence was, they had a great many converts such as they were ; but thinking people looked upon

the missionaries as more converted to heathenism, than the heathen to Christianity.”\*

I have thus imperfectly fulfilled the task which I assigned to myself in several preceding lectures, designed to exhibit the general characteristics of a good sermon. The first characteristic, which I stated to be indispensable in a sermon, is, that it be *evangelical*. After showing what this implies, I urged the importance of it from the twofold consideration, that no other than the evangelical system, fully brought out in sermons, is *adapted* to accomplish the great *end* of preaching; and that in point of *fact*, no other ever *has accomplished* this end.

The next characteristic of a good sermon is, that it be *instructive*; namely,—that it have an *important subject*; that it be *perspicuous* in method and language; that it be *rich in matter*; that it have the form of *discussion* rather than that of *declamation*; and that it exhibit divine truth in its *connexions*.

That a Christian sermon ought to be instructive, appears from the *constitution of the human mind*;—from the *nature of the gospel*;—from the best *examples*, and the best *effects* of preaching;—and from the tendency of instructive preaching, and of this only, to *promote* the *unity* and *strength* of the church.

The third characteristic of a good sermon is *directness*. What this implies is illustrated from the preaching of Christ, and of Whitefield. The causes which produce the *indefinite* and *indirect* sort of preaching, are;—*Want of intellectual precision in the preacher*;—*false taste in the preacher*;—*constitutional delicacy of temperament in the preacher*;—and *absolute want of piety, or a low state of piety*.

The topics on which I have thus expressed my thoughts at full length, I regard as of vital importance to the interests of religion. Doubtless the real gospel may be preached so technically, or paradoxically, or controversially, or with such an air of ostentatious fidelity, as to frustrate its proper effects. But the present preachers of our country are unquestionably more in

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\* Fuller's Works, II. 38.



danger of erring on the side of *cautious reserve*, than of *indiscretion*, in exhibiting Christian doctrines. These, as I have said in another place, were preached with much more frequency and directness formerly, than they are now preached, at least by ministers generally.

The taste of this day is not for hard thinking, but for narrative, stir, bustle, excitement. In the department of Christian action, our churches are progressive; in religious discrimination, in strength and soundness of doctrinal views, they have, for some time, been losing ground. There is a deterioration, analogous to that which the aged Englishman described in looking back, through many by-gone years, to the time of his boyhood. "Then," said he, "we had oaken tables, and oaken plates, and oaken seats, and willow baskets; and then we had oaken *men*. Now we have mahogany tables, and mahogany seats, and silken cushions, and silver vases; and now we have *willow men*, and *silken men*. Then the doors had latches, now they have locks and bars. Then the men defended the houses, now the houses must defend the men."

The fathers who planted these churches were hardy, robust Christians. Sons of Saxon ancestors, and imbued with the spirit of Puritan intrepidity, they not only maintained, at every sacrifice, the right to think for themselves in matters of religion, but did think for themselves. They understood their own system of faith. Trained in the fires of persecution, and accustomed to the buffetings of the winty blast, they could digest strong food. The solid nutriment of Christian truth gave them firmness in purpose, and vigor in execution for the work before them. But we are in danger of rearing a puny race of Christians, of sickly temperament; whose capricious appetite must be fed with delicacies;—a race of religious invalids, pallid and feeble, compared with the men of might, from whom they are descended.

There may be a religion, which consists much in popular excitement, and which appears well in public meetings, and subscription lists, but is wanting in substance. It is a religion bet-

ter adapted to parade in the soldier's uniform, than to encounter the marches of a wintry campaign, and the pushing of bayonets. When Christians generally shall be well instructed, in the great truths of the gospel; and shall exhibit the fruits of a solid, enlightened, consistent, fervent, enduring piety, the church will be "terrible as an army with banners."

But if the American pulpit has in these respects failed, to any serious extent, of maintaining its legitimate influence, in what way did this come to pass?

During the last century, Arminian views having been gradually ushered into many pulpits, the way was prepared for a lax theology, in various forms, to diffuse its influence among the churches, instead of the stricter views of the Puritan Fathers. Pious ministers, through a process unperceived by themselves, became the subjects of this influence. The first step of accommodation was to modify the *phrasology* of Calvinism, by adopting in sermons a generality of terms more acceptable to hearers of fastidious taste. Such a course was honestly deemed expedient, by many good men, because the customary terms of orthodoxy had been, in some places, so distorted by misrepresentation, as to convey to the hearers a meaning wide from the real sentiments of the preacher.

The next step of accommodation was a studied *concealment of the doctrines themselves*; against which, just in proportion as their advocates gave way, an unmeasured and unmitigated hostility was waged by their opposers. The leaders in error advanced with bold front, to occupy every inch of ground, abandoned by over cautious Calvinists. At last, when about 1815, they displayed their banner in open day, the state of the Christian community, in the region which had been the chief theatre of this declension, was, in many respects, not merely extraordinary, it was deplorable. Churches there were, planted by the Pilgrims, and in whose cemeteries reposed the dust of their venerable founders; churches, whose former pastors had been burning and shining lights; churches, whose present pastors had gloried in their attachment to the doctrines of the Reformation,

and whose public reputation for orthodoxy assigned them to the first post of martyrdom, should martyrdom become the test of fidelity ; and yet, strange as the fact may seem, and lamentable as it certainly is, these same churches, for years together had too, rarely heard any one great doctrine of the Reformation fully, distinctly, unequivocally exhibited from the pulpit. *Generally and indefinitely* they were accustomed to hear all these truths maintained, but not in the form of *undisguised, specific statement and proof*. On the contrary, men who were communicants in these churches, zealous too, for an undefined orthodoxy, if they had happened to hear a sermon from some preacher, not aware of the cautious diction to which they were accustomed, or not disposed to adopt it, would probably have complained of that sermon. Under an explicit discourse on total depravity, or personal election, or special, divine influence in regeneration, these hearers, notwithstanding their zeal for orthodoxy, might have writhed with impatience, or perhaps like the hearers of the dying Stephen, been “filled with wrath.”

The lines are now drawn, and I trust in God, that the period will no more return, in which his ministers shall be subjected to the influence of so many motives, tempting them to appease the enemies of the gospel, by concealment or mutilation of the truth. But the enemy is still in the field. And while the wrecks of churches, ruined by the policy of over-cautious and accommodating pastors, are before us ; while the arrears of our own neglected duty are to be brought up ;—it is no time for a half-way system of preaching the gospel. Let every ambassador of the cross take for his motto, “**THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH, AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH.**”

Forty years ago, infidelity was writing out its inferences in blood. The theories of Voltaire and his associates, though but very partially carried into execution in the tragic scenes of revolutionary France, produced results of most appalling interest to the civilized world. The career of infidelity, sanguinary and short as it was, furnished a refutation of its own principles, bet-

ter adapted to practical and popular conviction, than a thousand abstract arguments. Having rioted in the murder of millions, it thrust its sword into its own bosom, and lay for a third of a century dead, the nuisance and the execration of Christendom. During that period not one respectable advocate for open infidelity appeared on the globe.

Within a few years, however, a kind of atheistical skepticism seems to be struggling into renovated life. Under the disguise of the Christian name at first, it re-commenced war upon the truths of the gospel. Acquiring courage by degrees, it has come forth at length, in the ephemeral sheet, in the newspaper paragraph, and in the popular harangue, to attack revivals of religion, the cause of missions, the Christian sabbath; and to assail in every form of vulgar sophistry and vituperation, the ministers and the institutions of the gospel. To crown the whole, (if I may be excused for alluding to a fact so extraordinary,) female Lecturers, trained in the worst schools of European profligacy, imbued with a shameless licentiousness of sentiment, unexampled in the annals of human hardihood, have stood forth in crowded assemblies to revile the Bible, the Son of God, and all that is sacred in religion, and to promulgate doctrines, at the mention of which common decency would be put to the blush.

But what is the practical bearing of these statements, as to the obligations resting on Christians? Briefly this. Churches and ministers must no longer take it for granted that truths, because they are self-evident, or are taught in the Bible, will not be disputed. A deadly apathy to all religion, is not the only obstacle which its friends are called to encounter. *Infidelity*, in its thousand, Protean forms, is abroad in the land. Let this fact be remembered, by every man who is permitted to occupy a Christian pulpit. Let it be remembered by the conductors of every College, and High-school, and Bible-class; —and remembered too, by every school-committee, entrusted with the selection of teachers, and of elementary books, for

children and youth. Be it as it may, however, in regard to all other men, the preacher of the gospel certainly can find no apology in the aspects of this day, for remissness of effort in communicating *instruction, thorough, explicit, radical instruction*, in divine truth.

## LECTURE XXIII.

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### ON THE CULTIVATION OF SPIRITUAL HABITS, AND PROGRESS IN STUDY.

[Delivered at the opening of the Academical year, Nov. 1831.]

GENTLEMEN,

The character which this Seminary sustains from year to year, while we are connected with it, is intimately related to the character which it *will* sustain, and the influence it *will exert* on the world, through generations to come. Its foundations were laid in faith and prayer, by men who solemnly felt their need of divine guidance in every movement, and whose chief hope of success, in their sacred enterprise, was a devout reliance on the providence of God.

On all to whom the interests of this Seminary are specially confided, and all who are admitted to share in its benefits, there rests the full force of a religious obligation, to fulfil, as far as possible, the purpose of its venerable Founders. In this view the Faculty think it very proper that hereafter, each academical year should be opened with a public Lecture, on some sub-

ject appropriate to the circumstances and pursuits of those who are prosecuting theological studies here.

The topics to which your attention might be profitably directed on this first occasion of the kind, are various; such as your relations to one another, and the duties growing out of these, namely, Christian example, sympathy, and fraternal admonition;—relations to your Instructors; relations to ministers and Christians abroad; the best season, and the best means of deciding on your destination for life; importance and means of preserving health; growth in personal piety and progress in study.

My present remarks will be confined to the two last topics, especially to the last. The brevity with which I am compelled to treat the subject of personal religion, at this time, is not to be understood as implying that I regard its importance as secondary to that of any other subject. On the contrary, all your instructors, gentlemen, are united in the sentiment, and that sentiment acquires new strength continually, that whatever else you may possess or acquire, without the love of God, shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost, you cannot be qualified to preach the gospel;—nay, in the attempt to do it, you would probably become a burden on the church, and a reproach to the ministry.\* But as my chief object lies in another direction, I

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\* We must indeed work, like Nehemiah and his men, with the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other. We have to build and to fight at the same time, and with incessant employment. The progress of the work would be stopped by the laying down of the trowel. The enemy would gain a temporary advantage by the sheathing of the sword. Nothing therefore remains but to maintain the posture of resistance in dependance upon him who is our wise Master-builder, and the Captain of our salvation—waiting for our rest, our crown, our home.—BRIDGES.

Magnum opus omnino et arduum conamur: sed nihil difficile amanti puto.—CICERO.

The eloquent author of the Reformed Pastor, having spoken of Paul's charge to the Elders at Ephesus, says;

“O brethren, write it on your study doors, or set it as your copy in capital letters, still before your eyes. Could we but well learn two

cannot enlarge on the importance of personal religion in ministers, nor even touch many interesting branches of the subject, which demand the solemn and often-repeated consideration of theological students. In this division of the Lecture, I shall remark only on one point, **THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SPIRITUAL HABITS, WHICH YOU FORM.**

According to a settled law of our minds, habits are formed by the periodical recurrence of the same thing. Even in those habits which are called passive, regular reiteration stamps impression. No man forgets that there is a sun, or doubts his return tomorrow ; but if there were no *regularity* in the succession of day and night, no *order* in the seasons,—there could be no *experience*, and the business of the world must cease. When a man's habit of dining at a particular hour becomes fixed, it is of little absolute importance whether it is early or late ; but if that hour is *changed* continually, so as to be early one day, and late another, he has *no habit* ; and is liable to suffer, both in comfort and health.

By the influence of custom, things laborious or irksome become tolerable and even pleasant ; things apparently impossible become easy ;—things trifling or indifferent become important. A man of twenty may, with little trouble, change his room, his

or three lines of it, what preachers should we be ! Write all this upon your hearts, and it will do yourselves and the Church more good than twenty years' study of those lower things, which, though they get you greater applause in the world, yet separated from this, will make you but sounding brass, and tinkling cymbals."—BAXTER.

"Qui cupit juxta Paulum esse *διδασκῆτις*, det operam ut prius sit *θεοδιδασκῆτις* i. e. Divinitus edoctus."—ERASMUS.

"None but he who made the world can make a Minister of the Gospel. If a young man has capacity, culture and application may make him a scholar, a philosopher, or an orator ; but a true minister must have certain principles, motives, feelings, and aims, which no industry or endeavors of men can either acquire or communicate. They must be given from above, or they cannot be received."

NEWTON.



bed, his chair ;—he breaks up no habit ; but to a man of eighty, the change would be a real inconvenience.

Now, to apply these illustrations. The man who imagines that he can perform his secret devotions in the *street*, as well as in his *closet*, or as well without, as with *stated times* for the purpose, is ignorant of his own mind. Intellectual and spiritual, as well as other habits, are formed on the principles of association. In the regular recurrence of the thing to be done, there must be identity of *time*, and *place*, and *circumstances*. He who assigns to his closet devotions a particular season, will find the return of that season bring with it the recollection of the duty ; so that the omission of it, at the customary time, will be attended with mental uneasiness. His avocations too, will readily become adjusted to this settled order, so as not to intrude on his hours of communion with God. But the man who waits for *impulses*, and goes to his closet only at irregular times, has no advantage of *habit* in this duty. He attends to it without constancy, without preparation, without enjoyment. He has no current of spiritual feeling ; other engagements thrust themselves between him and God ; the day and the night pass away, without any season of retirement ; he forgets to pray, because he has no *system*, in the care of his own heart. Thus perhaps, he slides into estrangement from his closet, for days and weeks together.

There is no point in Christian experience more settled than this, that there is an intimate connexion between *enjoyment* in closet devotions, and *their return at regular seasons*. The best writers on the subject say so. Devout Christians, learned and unlearned, say so. Our own experience says so. Several hundred students of this Seminary to whom, at different times, I have put the inquiry, in private conversations, have been agreed on this point, without one exception.

If you would form such spiritual habits then, as shall promote your progress in personal religion, draw a sacred enclosure around your hallowed seasons of retirement, to preserve them from interruption. To accomplish this, your *times* of secret devotion should be so chosen, as not to interfere with *other duties* ;

I mean such duties as *stated, social devotions, exercise, voluntary associations, and study*. Your chief danger, probably, will be found under the last particular. For the sake of study, especially when hard pressed, you will be liable sometimes to attempt a compromise with conscience, for the neglect of your closet. The Christian merchant, mechanic, or farmer, knows that such a compromise, for the sake of mere *secular* business, would be *sinful*; but the Christian student, all whose business is sacred, may more easily fall into this temptation. Take care then that no pressure of study shall become an apology for omitting your regular devotions. Whenever you feel inclined to waver on this point, take care lest your spiritual habits be utterly supplanted. Think of Daniel, prime minister of Persia, with the affairs of one hundred and twenty provinces resting on his mind, yet finding time to go “into his chamber, three times a day, that he might pray and give thanks to God.” Think of Alfred, encompassed with the cares of monarchy, of Luther, buffeted by the storms of Papal wrath, of Thornton, encompassed with a thousand mercantile engagements, yet never allowing the hurry of business to intrude on their regular hours of devotion. And you, in this consecrated retreat from the bustle of the world, *you*, provided with every facility for communion with God,—too busy to pray!—Something then is woefully wrong, in your studies, or in yourself, or both. Too *busy*!—Then forego your *meals*. Better starve your *body*, than your *soul*.

Next to *regularity* in spiritual habits, I would urge *consistency*. The most nutritious food would not preserve him in health, who should mingle with it daily, a little portion of some deadly drug. So the man who is regular in his devotions, but is accustomed to violate his conscience in other things; such as remissness in observing the sanctity of the sabbath;—indulgence of colloquial habits, that cherish levity and frivolity of temper;—unkind and censorious remarks respecting his brethren;—or any other practice that is decidedly wrong, may have some grace, perhaps, notwithstanding these inconsistencies, but he will not *grow* in grace.

*Vigilant and faithful self-inspection*, is also indispensable. Without this you may be a backslider, and may have been so for months, and yet not be aware of your condition. Doubtless there is in our profession, from the peculiar relations which we sustain to those around us, a lamentable tendency to live upon some old hope, taking it for granted that we are Christians, without sufficient, daily evidence that it is so. In this way probably not a few, whose profession and business it has been to promote the salvation of others, will fail of salvation themselves. Constant vigilance too, is necessary to theological students, in sustaining their spiritual habits, from the fact that they have so much to do with the *theory* of religion, and the investigation of speculative difficulties; that they study and talk about the Bible as a Class-book; study for the ultimate benefit of others, not the direct benefit of themselves. Hence they are liable to rest in an *intellectual* religion in distinction from the simple piety of plain Christians.

Again, the success of a theological student in cultivating spiritual habits, depends much on the *helps to devotional feeling which he employs*. For this end, besides the stated reading of the scriptures in the *common version*, which will be less likely than the originals to induce philological enquiries, I would urge the daily reading, more or less of the best devotional books, especially those of the old Puritans. Let him also secure the aid of at least one devoted Christian brother, on whose fidelity and judgment he can rely, to warn him seasonably of any declension in his spiritual habits.

I have room to glance only at one more particular; as to the formation of spiritual habits, namely, *the motives by which you are governed*, in theological studies. Just so far as you "walk with God" in the closet, you will have an abiding sense of his presence through the day, controlling and sanctifying all your pursuits. You will feel your dependence on God, and study with a view to his glory, and thus will make such arrangement of duties, that your time will turn to the best account. But if you *neglect* your closet, God will gradually be

supplanted, in your affections, by undue regard to *self*. Some form of unhallowed ambition will gain possession of your heart,—will lead to undue reliance for usefulness, upon your own genius or acquisitions;—and set up as the chief object of your studies, an ultimate regard to your own reputation, or interest, or influence, and not to the glory of God.\*

But I must proceed to the other branch of this Lecture, namely PROGRESS IN STUDY, on which my remarks must be more extended.

As to the importance of intellectual acquisitions, for high usefulness in the ministry, a just public sentiment has been gaining ground, within the last twenty years. Yet to this day, very inadequate views on this subject are too prevalent. This appears from the fact that, in some parts of the country, there are in-

\* “The solidly-learned, the studious, and well-furnished man is but the unshapen mass from which the Christian Minister is formed. The plastic energy—the quickening influence of the Almighty Spirit is still needed to put light, life, and motion, into the inert substance; to mould it into his image, and to make it a “vessel of honor, meet for the Master’s use.” Nor must it be denied, that these studious habits, to which we have attributed considerable importance, are attended with proportionate temptations. Any enlargement of intellectual knowledge has a natural tendency to add fuel to the fire of our self-importance. The habit of study growing into a passion, may crave indulgence at the expense of conscience or propriety, by pre-occupying the time that belongs to duties of equal moment. Much, however, of apprehended danger will be repelled by the regulation of a sound judgment, and a spiritual mind, in directing these studies to the main end of the ministry. A minister should remember that himself with all his studies is consecrated to the service of the sanctuary. Let every thing be done therefore with a view to one great end. Let all the rest of our knowledge be like lines drawn from the vast circumference of universal nature, pointing to that divine centre, God and religion.”—BRIDGES.

“Not to read or study at all, is to tempt God; and to do nothing but study, is to forget the ministry; to study, only to glory in one’s knowledge is a shameful vanity: to study, in search of the means to flatter sinners, a deplorable prevarication; but to store one’s mind with the knowledge proper to the saints by study and by prayer, and to diffuse that knowledge in solid instructions, and practical *exhortations*,—this is to be a prudent, zealous, and laborious Minister.”

QUESNEL.

stances of young men, every year, who are licensed to preach, (and that by regular ecclesiastical bodies,) with very little *theological* study, and some with almost *no study of any sort*.\* Others, who engage in a regular course of study, are constantly tempted to cut it short, by the preposterous solicitations of ministers who desire assistance; by more or less of pecuniary embarrassment; and by a restless anxiety to enter their profession, with the briefest preparation that usage will tolerate. It is a fact truly remarkable, that the oldest theological seminary in the country, is still the *only* one that has seen fit to take a decided stand on this subject, and to make the settled purpose of pursuing a three years' course of study, a condition of membership. The oldest Seminary of the Presbyterian church once stood on the same ground, but its Officers have long been struggling against an unpropitious current of public opinion, in the vain endeavor to restore it to its original footing.

With this state of things in view, I shall proceed to offer

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\* Verum ad conciones sacras admittuntur, interdum etiam assiliunt, adolescentes, leves, indocti, quasi nihil fit facilius, quam apud populum exponere Divinam scripturam, et abunde sufficiat perfricuisse faciem, et abstersa pudore, linguam volvere. Hoc malum ex eo fonte manat, quod non perpenditur, quid sit ecclesiastici concionatoris tum dignitas, tum difficultas, tum utilitas.—ERASMUS.

The cursory perusal of a few books, is thought to be sufficient to make any man wise enough to be a Minister. And not a few undertake ordinarily to be teachers of others, who would scarcely be admitted as tolerable disciples in a well ordered church. But there belongeth more unto this wisdom, knowledge, and understanding than most men are aware of. Were the nature of it duly considered, and withal the necessity of it to the Ministry of the Gospel, probably some would not so rush on the work as they do, which they have no provision or ability for the performance of. It is in brief, such a comprehension of the scope and end of the Scripture; such an acquaintance with the system of particular doctrinal truths, in their rise, tendency, and use; such an habit of mind in judging of spiritual things, and comparing them one with another; such a distinct insight into the springs and course of the mystery of the love, grace, and will of God in Christ, as enables them in whom it is, to declare the counsel of God, to make known the way of life, of faith, and obedience unto others, and to instruct them in their whole duty to God and man therein.—OWEN.

SOME REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE TO A THEOLOGICAL STUDENT, and then mention some HINDRANCES TO STUDY, which should be guarded against.

In remarking on the first of these topics,\* it is proper to say more distinctly than I have said above, that for some time past, the course of events has been such as to create a strong demand, and every year increases this demand, for higher and higher qualifications in the Ministry. The inquisitive, and enterprising, and intelligent character of the age; the resources of learning perverted by the advocates of error; above all, the wide field of moral influence opening in our Western States, and the call for men to go to the heathen, who may be safely trusted in translating the Bible, and laying Christian foundations for centuries to come;—all these, and many other considerations have opened on the Church a new era, calling for augmented resources, in the moral and intellectual furniture of ministers. In accordance with these remarks, public sentiment has most distinctly declared itself, in the establishment of Theological Seminaries, and in the patronage they have received, from the most judicious men in the land. Before these measures were adopted, there had long been a gradual falling off from the ground occupied by the early fathers of our churches, many of whom were distinguished scholars, especially in the literature of the sacred writings.

In urging the necessity of an extended course of theological study, nothing could be farther from my design, than to cast any reproach on those who, like myself, entered the Ministry, before the facilities which now exist for such a course of study, were provided. It is equally remote from my purpose to say, that every candidate for the Ministry, without regard to his age, and other circumstances, should pursue a three years' course of study in theology. But what I mean to say is, and the time in my opinion has come to say this very distinctly, that henceforward,

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\* The reader is here apprised that the thoughts which follow under this head, have been already published by the author, in Volume V. of the Quarterly Register.

such a course of study is short enough, as a general rule. If any one is providentially prevented from pursuing it, that should be submitted to, as his calamity. I am the more confident in my opinions on this subject from the fact, that during twenty-five years' experience, as an Instructor of theological students, nineteen of which have been passed in my present relations, I have heard not a few young men lament their own haste in entering the ministry, but not an individual have I known to intimate that he had spent too much time in preparatory studies.

But we must now drop this prefatory matter, and come to the main point, why a thorough intellectual preparation for the sacred office is necessary.

When Paul says to Timothy that a bishop should not be a *novice*, there is a figurative allusion in the original word, that is very significant. Literally the expression is, "not an infant." It denotes that want of knowledge or skill which we see in a new born child, that would certainly fail of success, if set to accomplish any work requiring the strength and intelligence of a man. There is a secondary sense too, that is scarcely less pertinent. It refers to a tree or plant recently set in the earth, which has not had time to become *rooted*, and is easily disturbed by the wind or any external violence. The meaning is, that a Christian minister ought not only to be mature in religious experience, but to have a sound, well furnished understanding. Both these requisites he needs, lest being inflated with pride, he fall into the condemnation of the devil. That stability of character which can resist temptation, and qualify a man to be a guide in the church, must come from fixed religious opinions, grounded on a thorough acquaintance with divine truth. The apostle, that he might be certainly understood on this subject, often exhorts Timothy to diligence in reading, and meditation, and study of the Scriptures, the great store-house of divine knowledge; through which the minister might become furnished for his work.

In remarking on this subject then, I would advance no theories that are extravagant, none that are new,—none indeed that

are not sanctioned by apostolic authority. Let any man (if in this age of light there is any man, who advocates the cause of clerical ignorance,) read the epistles to Timothy and Titus, and then answer this plain question ;—did a Teacher of religion, who had the gift of inspiration to understand the scriptures, and the gift of tongues to preach ; a Teacher too, born amid the scenery and customs described in the Bible, and familiar with the language in which important parts of it were written,—did he need the aid of study to qualify him for his work ? and can a man, who has not one of all these advantages, be qualified for the same work, *without* study ? How is he to know what is in the Bible, till he has *studied* the Bible ? and how can he *study the Bible*, so as to have, concerning what is peculiar in its language, local allusions and usages, the knowledge requisite for a public Teacher, without much reading of *other* books ? Does he claim to be an inspired man ? Let him stand forth and prove his inspiration by working a miracle. Just as well may his hearers claim to be inspired, so as to have no need of him, or of any one as a religious Teacher.

Now the positions, which I would take to show the connexion between *intellectual furniture* and *success* in a minister, are these four ;—a man must have *knowledge* himself, before he can teach others ;—he must have *capacity* to learn, before he can acquire knowledge ; he must have *time* to learn ; and he must have *instruction*. The first is self-evident. The second admits no diversity of opinion, except as to the *degree* of native talent, which is necessary to a minister. Concerning this too, all will agree thus far, that the highest powers of genius may find ample scope in this work ; and that on the other hand, decided weakness of intellect is a disqualification. He that stands on middle ground, between these two limits,—he that has a fair average of native talent with other men, may, with a good heart and adequate culture, be a successful minister. *Good sense he must have* ; but brilliant powers are by no means indispensable.

It is self-evident too, that he must have *time* to learn, before he can hope for success in his work. Common sense decides



so, in regard to *all* acquisitions, which are to be made by *study*. In the first schools of Europe, established for the two great professions, law and medicine, the period of study is *three, four*, and in some cases, *five* years, superadded to an academical education. In the same departments, three years of professional study is made a legal requisite, in different parts of our own country. But is the care of men's *immortal* interests a business, that demands less maturity of preparation, than that of their *bodies* or *estates*? Is the interpretation of the sacred oracles, and the preaching of the everlasting gospel, so trifling an affair, that it may be safely left to any novice, who chooses to undertake it? Plainly, he cannot be a successful teacher in the church of God, who has not had *time* to learn. The knowledge that he needs is to be *gained*, not by intuition, not by inspiration, not by any "royal road," but by patient, long continued study. Solomon has told him all the secret of gaining this knowledge; he must *dig* for it, as for hidden treasures.\*

Need I add that he must have *instruction*? The obvious necessity of this was felt by the fathers of New England, those pious and sagacious men, who founded colleges, with the primary view of raising up an educated ministry, for their descendants. And to these wise provisions, men of like spirit have added the endowment of Theological Seminaries, that the sons of the

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\* If knowledge is not to be despised, then it will follow that the means of obtaining it are not to be neglected, viz. study; and that this is of great use in order to a preparation for publicly instructing others. And though having the heart full of the powerful influences of the Spirit of God, may at some times enable persons to speak profitably, yea, very excellently without study, yet this will not warrant us needlessly to cast ourselves down from the pinnacle of the temple, depending upon it, that the angel of the Lord will bear us up, and keep us from dashing our foot against a stone, when there is another way to go down, though it be not so quick.—EDWARDS.

How few read enough to stock their minds? and the mind is no widow's cruse, which fills with knowledge as fast as we empty it. Why should a Clergyman labor less than a barrister? since in spiritual things, as well as temporal, it is "the hand of the diligent which maketh rich."—BICKERSTETH.

church, instead of rushing self-taught into this work, might enjoy the best advantages of professional instruction.

But it is said, "how can a young man of ardent piety spend year after year in preparatory study, while there are so few religious Teachers, and so many destitute churches, and perishing sinners around him? That young man ought to go at once to these starving souls with the bread of life." So, excellent men, and even ministers, have argued, and often remonstrated with the pious student, and perhaps have thrown him into serious perplexity as to his own duty. Now to relieve this perplexity, should he come to me for counsel, I would ask him,—Why did *Christ* delay the commencement of his ministry till he was thirty years of age? Was he not as well qualified as you, to preach at twenty-five? Were there no perishing sinners around him? Was there no lack of ministers then to teach the way of God in truth? Had you been in his place, you would have begun to preach, it seems, just so soon as you had happened to feel deeply the dreadful condition of sinners; and would have summoned to your aid, not *twelve* apostles, but *twelve thousand*. Are you then more wise than Christ? more benevolent than Christ to the souls of men?

Besides, is a young man of course qualified to be a religious teacher, because he is ardently pious? Then the wisest men, in every age, have been mistaken. Then Colleges, and Theological Seminaries, and Education Societies, are a useless incumbrance to the world. But if preparation is *necessary*, God has decided that these vacant churches and perishing sinners must *wait*, till the preparation is made by *study*, for it is not made now by miracles. And there is no hardship, on this supposition more than on the other; if piety were all that the churches should desire in ministers; still they must *wait* for God to make pious men. For if all such men, who hope to enter the ministry, were taken from our Seminaries, and Colleges, and Academies too, and made preachers at once, the cry for more laborers would still come from every corner of the land.

Still, some may urge by way of objection that facts, and the as-

pects of Providence, are against this reasoning. Ministers have been very successful with but little study; and the wants of the world are so urgent, that we must dispense with preparatory qualifications, except a good heart and good sense.

That such men as John Newton and Thomas Scott have been a great blessing to the church, it were as idle to doubt, as it is, that their usefulness would have been far more eminent, with an adequate early education. But see what is the result, if you try the principle assumed in the objection by common sense. A man of capacity and integrity, is a farmer, a skilful farmer; does it follow that, with all his good sense and knowledge of husbandry, he could manage a *ship* in a tempest? and if he should do it, would it therefore be safe to commit all concerns of navigation to farmers? Another man is a skilful *merchant*, and knows the quality and price of every article he deals out to his customers; is he therefore qualified to deal out *medicines* to the sick? another is a skilful *lawyer*; but give him the surgeon's knife, and call him to perform an operation; are you sure that he would do it with success? I need not wait for an answer to such inquiries. Then take this farmer, this merchant, this lawyer, and suppose each to be ardently pious, if you please; and ask common sense whether he would, of course, be a successful preacher of the Gospel, or interpreter of the Bible?

If any one demands that I should tell more particularly, *how* deficiency in theological knowledge will hinder a preacher's success, I answer,—In the first place, his public instructions will fail to interest intelligent hearers. Some such hearers he will have, in this age of mental activity; when reading and thinking are so customary, even among common men. Should they be satisfied for a few weeks or months, they will ultimately come to perceive, that his sermons are trite and feeble in thought. This result is quite certain, if he is only a common man, with common efforts.

Or, in the second place, if he aims to retrieve the past deficiencies of his education, by great and special efforts in his preparations to preach, while at the same time, he sustains the

great and various, and arduous duties of his office, *he is a dead man*; he will sink into hopeless infirmity, or a premature grave.

Or, in the third place, if he attempts to bring up all arrears, by incessant study, while he saves his life by neglect of pastoral duties, though he should become a tolerable *preacher*, he is a *dead man* in another respect; there will be a sad failure in the amount of his usefulness.

Facts are full of instruction on this subject. Not a few young men of bright promise, who might have become champions of the truth, have been so impatient to hasten into the ministry, that they have fatally blighted their own prospects; and instead of attaining to distinguished success, have scarcely reached the point of mediocrity. The minister now, whose maxim is to expect little things, and attempt little things, mistakes the day in which he lives. What was *knowledge* in the thirteenth century, is *ignorance* now. What was *energy* then, is *imbecility* and *stupidity* now. As was said in another case, it becomes not our sacred profession, in this period of intellectual progress, to remain like the ship that is moored to its station, only to mark the rapidity of the current that is sweeping by. Let the intelligence of the age outstrip us, and leave us behind, and religion would sink, with its teachers, into insignificance. Ignorance cannot wield this intelligence. Give to the Church a feeble ministry, and the world breaks from your hold; your main spring of moral influence is gone.

Would you then, gentlemen, become burning and shining lights in the church of God, study, indefatigable, systematic study is essential to the attainment of your object.

All that remains, is to suggest some of the most common HINDRANCES TO SUCCESSFUL STUDY.

The *first* I shall mention is *imperfect health*. Every one of you ought to understand, without my aid, the importance of *physical*, to *mental* vigor. In the majority of cases, where there is a serious failure of health, the mischief lies chiefly in the wrong habits of students. The man who is worn down with seven years of academical study, and has never learned the first

elements of preserving health, or restoring it when impaired, is predisposed to break down under the continuance of severe mental application, live where he may. His first lesson is, not to presume for one day on sustaining sufficient health for study, without a rigid system of exercise. His second lesson is, so to understand and regard the powers of his own stomach, as not to swallow for food, in one minute, what may disable him for study a week. I cannot stay to multiply warnings on these points; you may read them in many a pallid face, and many a premature grave, of those to whom warnings have been given in vain.

I might here dwell on excess in *quantity* of food,—on neglect and indiscreet exposures, under what are termed common colds, in which three fourths of all pulmonary consumptions begin; on *late studies at night*, occasioned by misguided zeal, or by such negligence in the proper season of study as drives a man to extreme efforts by the midnight lamp, to the ruin perhaps of his eyes,—perhaps of his digestive or pulmonary organs.

A *second* hindrance to success in study arises from *infelicity of intellectual habits*. Some men have been students for years, but have not learned *how* to study. They have not acquired the *control* of their minds, so as to concentrate their attention on one subject, at one time. But to sit at the table, while the thoughts are at the ends of the earth, is not study. To sit at the table *without* thoughts, looking at the ceiling, in a listless reverie, is not *study*. A man may while away one half of his study hours in *getting ready* to study,—because his *indolent* mind dreads all intense application, or his *truant* mind has never been taught to come at his bidding, and bend itself to one thing in fixed attention. Strength, perhaps that mind may have, and sprightliness; but it accomplishes nothing to any purpose, for want of *discipline*. Hence a man of respectable talents and character, may enter on a new term, or a new department of study, with a good plan, and good resolutions, which all become broken and virtually nugatory in one fortnight, through want of self-control, and constancy of purpose.

A *third* and most important hindrance to study, is found in *avocations*. These may be *intellectual, social, secular, and religious*. The grand aim of a theological student should be to attain *substantial knowledge*, appropriate to his own sacred work, and the power of *communicating* that knowledge. If you ask me then, how much time can he properly spend in reading works of taste, periodicals, and newspapers? I answer, in general, no more than he can afford to spend on circumstantial and appendages to his main business; and never so much as to unsettle his mind, or consume his proper time for solid study. Poetry of the higher class, such as *Paradise Lost*, is not indeed an avocation, as it is directly subsidiary to the study of oratory; but to the reading of *fiction*, except very sparingly, there are, I think, insuperable objections, though I cannot state them now.

As to *social* avocations, the liability to mistake among us, is not so great as to require any notice, except in two respects; one is, the visiting of fellow students' rooms in study hours—a practice which, improper as it is, I suppose can never go to any extreme, as it must meet a prompt corrective in the public sentiment of the Seminary. The other is, those occasional visits to friends, in other towns, which call away a student from his business here. In this case too, only a general rule can be established, namely, that such calls should be regulated not by caprice, but by Christian principle. The cases heretofore have not been numerous, in which a mistake on this point has amounted to serious injury; in a few it has amounted to utter ruin, as to improvement in study.

For *secular* avocations there can be no occasion here, except those little attentions to his own affairs, which are always the indispensable duty of every man. It is a principle settled by the Founders of the Seminary, while their unexampled munificence provided its endowments, that no student shall sacrifice his time here for purposes of gain. And the sentiment of Faculty and students has unitedly been, that the Seminary should not be made a place of merchandize in books or other things, beyond those small accommodations, which by the agency of

one student, he may render to his brethren, without serious infringement on his own time.

Under the head of *religious* avocations, I should wish to enlarge, more than my limits will allow. Perhaps there is no subject on which a conscientious, judicious student will more feel the need of advice, and none certainly on which it is more difficult for me to *give* advice than this. Often I have been asked, to what extent is it best for students of the Seminary to be in the habit of attending religious meetings abroad? Now, the temperament, the health, the intellectual and spiritual habits of different men are so various, that what would be a proper answer to one man would be very inappropriate to another. In general, cultivation of the *heart* and of the *intellect* are joint duties, neither of which can be properly forgotten by theological students. Occasional exceptions do not alter this principle. We wish to train up here none but revival men; and every revival man may sometimes find special advantage in giving up an hour or a day of study, for the spiritual good of his own soul, and the souls of his fellow men. For this reason, among others, your Instructors have welcomed with devout gratitude to God, the recent effusions of his Spirit, on our churches, so adapted to exert a sanctifying influence on young men preparing for the holy ministry; and have regarded with special indulgence the repeated wishes of individuals to be absent, for the sake of laboring in revivals, or witnessing their power. But doubtless, there are some due limits on this subject. At a protracted meeting in Andover, all our classical exercises are properly suspended. But another occurs six miles distant, another ten, another fifteen, in successive weeks. Shall the whole of us attend these?—or what proportion of us? Clearly, to relinquish our exercises here from month to month, would not do. The Trustees, the public, our own consciences, would remonstrate. But for one half, or one fourth of us to be absent, virtually amounts to the same thing, as to the order and interest of classical exercises; for they cannot go on unless both Instructors and students are in the Lecture Room.

The same principle applies to the absences of individuals for the sake of attending *monthly concerts*, and other occasional religious meetings, in neighboring towns, a thing which can be deemed proper, as a general rule, only when it can be done without losing any regular classical exercise. On the *sabbath*, too, the Laws require students to be here, as much as on other days; and the habit of going abroad, on that day, to any considerable extent, would for very obvious reasons be inexpedient.

There may be a hundred things, desirable in themselves to be done, which we cannot do. Your Instructors might find urgent reasons to be often absent, to visit friends, to attend ordinations, or councils, or other important occasions; but our paramount duty in term time, is to be *here*, with as few exceptions as possible. Just so you will often have calls abroad, in which your feelings are deeply interested, but which sober judgment will lead you to forego, rather than forego your *main business*.

Discursive and protracted as my remarks have been, I must add several more.

Let no one understand me as urging him to become a *mere student*, to the neglect of his duties as a man and a Christian. He who is ardent in the pursuit of knowledge, may gradually bring his mind to such a condition, as to feel quite absolved from the claims of relative duty, or of common civility; having no time, as he thinks, to regulate his temper, his heart, and his manners, by the spirit of the gospel, and becoming, like him of old, "such a son of Belial that a man cannot speak to him." He may even form a habit so unhappy, as to feel his *secret devotions* to be an intrusion on his studies, and to carry his classical pursuits into the consecrated hours of the sabbath.

Let no one understand me as urging intense and unremitted study, at the sacrifice of health. I say again, take warning from the pale faces, and the premature graves of those who have refused to take warning. You must have stated relaxation, and stated exercise. As far as possible, make your *vacations*, a *real* and not a *nominal* concern. Some students from pecuniary emergency, and some from a laudable desire of doing good,



have committed themselves to such engagements for vacation, as to allow no remission of intellectual effort, and no opportunity for seeing their friends, without encroaching a week or two on term time, for this purpose. No man can be justified in doing this violence to his constitution, except from the pressure of some dire necessity. Three men out of four, who do this, ask leave of absence, to refit their health, during the following term.

In respect to *avocations* I have one general advice to give;—*cultivate the habit of doing every thing from religious principle, and every thing in its proper season.* It is your duty to pray in your *closet*,—but not at the *time* of social prayer in the chapel. It is your duty to pray in your closet, but not *when* your class are assembled to meet their Instructors, in the Lecture Room. It is your duty, as far as possible, to act on committees, and perform exercises assigned by voluntary associations of your brethren, but not within the time which you need for writing a sermon, or preparing for a Lecture. *Regular, prescribed exercises* have the *first* claim on your time, and should never be thrust aside by incidental things. It should be a point of conscience with every member of this Seminary, for his own good, as well as in conformity with his own sacred promise at matriculation, never to neglect these regular exercises, unless disabled by Providence. “*I was detained by company,*” is sometimes offered as a reason for such neglect, and it *may* be a good reason, *very rarely*; but in my own case as a student, from twelve years of age through College, it never *once* was regarded by me, as a reason for such neglect;—*never once*, has it been so, in the nineteen years of my connexion with this Seminary.

I spoke of *conscience*; but doubtless you would be surprised, gentlemen, to be told that among our beloved family of young ministers, who have been, from year to year, training up under our eye, for the most sacred and exalted work on earth, there should have been any, to whom *conscience* seemed to be, practically, a word of very small significance. Yet it is only the statement of a lamentable fact, that your Instructors have sometimes

been grieved to the heart, by witnessing, in apparently good men, a strange insensibility to the binding force of obligations, in which a plain religious duty, combined perhaps with a solemn, voluntary engagement, has been forgotten, or explained away, with a facility altogether unaccountable.

But the number of such cases has been comparatively small ; and I am happy to follow this statement, by another, which has been full of consolation to your Teachers, and which is full of instruction to you. Take the Catalogue of our Seminary, from the beginning, and mark the men, if you can, on that honored list, who, since they left us, have been most distinguished for usefulness, as ministers and missionaries ; and also the men,—not a few,—who have been elected Presidents and Professors, in Colleges and Theological Seminaries ;—and then, remember, that those same men were distinguished for *punctuality, and industry, and conscientious regard to order*, when they were here.

# LECTURES ON PUBLIC PRAYER.

## LECTURE I.

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### HISTORY OF PUBLIC PRAYER.

Among the ancient Jews, prayer constituted an important part of the synagogue worship. The most solemn and formal of these were those called the *eighteen prayers*. To these, which are ascribed to Ezra, Rabbi Gamaliel is said to have added a nineteenth against the Christians. Three times a day, at the stated hour of prayer, all who were of age were required to repeat these prayers ; and on synagogue days, viz. Monday, Thursday, and Saturday, they were offered up, with great solemnity, in the public assemblies.

Besides these nineteen prayers, the deliberate reading of which would occupy about ten minutes, others of a less formal kind were intermingled in their worship, and multiplied, till they gave to their Synagogue service, in the time of Christ, that undue *length*, with which he found fault. It seems too that this part of worship, among the Jews, degenerated into

a superstitious and ostentatious formality, for which our Savior severely rebuked the Pharisees. So exact were they as to the external form of this service, that if it was inconvenient for them to join the public assembly at the synagogue, when the hour of prayer arrived, they dropped whatever they had in hand, and offered up their devotions in the open street or market place. This custom, however unseemly, still exists in Catholic, and even in Malometan countries.

#### ORDER OF PUBLIC PRAYER.

In the primitive Christian church, the prayers, connected with reading the scriptures and singing, were so brief or so informal as scarcely to be noticed in the descriptions of public worship transmitted to us. All these descriptions agree in saying, that the regular season for the public prayers, was *after sermon*.

To prevent mistake in the remarks which follow, it should be remembered that the Lord's Supper was administered in the primitive churches on every Sabbath. Between the sermon and the communion service, was the season of prayer; which was offered, not in one continued address to God, but in successive addresses, adapted to the condition of different persons, who were usually, at least in the Eastern churches, divided into five classes; viz. (1) The *Catechumens*, that is, *hearers* or *enquirers* who were especially desirous of receiving religious instruction. (2) The *Exorcizans*, or persons supposed to be possessed by evil spirits. (3) *Candidates for baptism*. (4) *Penitents*, or those who were under the discipline and censures of the church. And (5) The *Faithful*, including all who were in regular standing as communicants. It seems probable that excepting the most general distinction of *catechumens* and *faithful*, separate prayers for these classes were rather occasional than stated. But on this point and several others we are left in some uncertainty by the writers of that period. All these writers, for example, agree in saying that the four first classes

above mentioned, were sent away from the assemblies, before the communion service began. But whether each class was dismissed successively, when the prayer appropriated to themselves was finished, or whether they were all dismissed together, before the communion service, seems doubtful, from the different statements of Justin, Chrysostom, Augustine, Ambrose, and the "Apostolical Constitutions." Probably the usage of different churches varied somewhat in different places and circumstances.

But while the above four classes might not be present at the prayers peculiar to the Faithful, there was still another class called *Hearers*, including Jews and Infidels, who were sent away before *any* of the prayers began.

The Deacon offered the first prayer for the Catechumens, because, as Chrysostom says, "they were viewed as yet aliens; not having liberty or confidence to pray for themselves, but needing the help of those who are already initiated, or ingrafted, into Christ." This was followed by another prayer, from the minister, called *the benediction of God*, and closed by an audible response of *Amen* from the people.—Any catechumen, by falling into scandalous sin, was liable to be thrust down to the rank of a hearer only; but after three years he might be permitted again to pray with the Catechumens.

#### POSTURE IN PRAYER.

Justin Martyr says that the people *stood* in prayer. According to the Apostolic Constitutions, they were to *kneel* in the first prayer, for the Catechumens, and to *stand* in the second. Origen often closed his sermon with an exhortation to the people "to *stand up* and pray." In the Gallican churches, at a later period, kneeling was accounted the most becoming posture, though a majority of the people often continued standing. Both standing and kneeling were evidently thought proper, though standing was most common.

It was a general custom to pray with the face directed towards

the *east*. The various reasons which have been alleged for this custom, I might examine at length, but the enquiry would be rather curious than important. Having adverted to this subject under the history of the pulpit, I will only add, that in my opinion, all these reasons may be resolved into a misconstruction of a few figurative texts, where allusion is made to Christ as the “day-spring,”—“the sun of righteousness,”—“the light of the world,” &c. and where he is supposed with no good reason, indeed, to be represented as *coming to judgment* from the east. Probably, too, the *superstition* (for so it must be called,) of praying with the face eastward, might have had more connexion than the Christians were aware with the Pagan custom of worshipping the rising sun. At least this is quite as supposable, as that the Christian sabbath itself, should have retained the name of *Sunday*, derived from the same Pagan origin. As to *gesture* in prayer, it need only be said that stretching forth the hands towards heaven, was a common attitude of supplication in the Jewish church, as it has been in all periods since.

#### LENGTH OF PRAYERS.

If I mistake not, the fact is quite observable in the history of the church,—(though I am not aware that others have made the remark,) that where there is least of *spirituality* in religious worship, there is most of *formality* and undue length. In the Jewish church, the longest specimen of prayer that was recorded, is that of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple; and this, though on a great, public occasion, did not exceed six or eight minutes in length. But in later periods of that church,—when the spirit of religion declined, and external forms were substituted for vital godliness, their prayers were protracted by “vain repetitions;”—and they hoped to be heard “for their much speaking.”

So it was in the Christian church.—Nothing could exceed the simplicity with which our Savior, both by precept and example, taught his disciples to pray. But as the primitive sim-

plicity of the gospel passed away, and the *forms* of devotion were again substituted for its *power*, the external rites of worship were extended, in number and length. In the time of Chrysostom, however, the whole service in public worship did not much exceed an hour ; so that prayers could not have occupied more than fifteen or twenty minutes. The division of the assembly into different classes, and the adaptation of distinct prayers to each, whenever it was introduced, was clearly not of Apostolic origin ; though prescribed in what was called the *Apostolic Constitutions*, a work, to say the least, of very questionable character, as to both authorship and antiquity. The form of prayer at the communion, as given in that work, is at least half an hour in length.

All we can affirm with certainty is, that from the fifth to the tenth century, while the church was losing the spirit of piety, she was increasing in the ceremonies and formalities of worship. Clerical ambition, aiming at the debasement of the people, not only discouraged the study of the scriptures in private, but suspended the reading of them in public. At length clerical indolence and ignorance gave up *preaching* too, and all public exposition of the scriptures. The inferior clergy devoted the seasons of public worship to saying mass ; while the Pope and his Cardinals were engrossed with the management of state affairs. Thus, for many centuries, both in the Romish and the Greek church, the great business of the Christian ministry, namely, to preach the gospel, has been given up ; and, except so far as the spirit of the reformation has compelled these degenerate churches to a different course, deluded men have been led to place their hopes of heaven, not on their knowledge or love of the truth, but on the number and length of their prayers.

#### PRAYING TO CHRIST, AND IN HIS NAME.

That this was a practice of the primitive church, authorised by Christ himself, is evident from the fact, that, while on earth, he commanded his disciples to pray *to* him, and in *his name* ;

that he *received* worship with *approbation*; that after his ascension, Christians *did* worship him, as in the case of the dying Stephen: that *angels* were commanded to worship him, as in the first chapter of Hebrews,—and *did* worship him, as in John's Apocalyptic vision of the worship in heaven.

The letter of Pliny to Trajan, as is well known to every reader of history, furnishes testimony unquestionable, that it was the custom of the early Christians to offer worship to Christ, as God. In later periods, the proof is abundant, that it was customary among the fathers, sometimes to address a part or the whole of a prayer, directly to Christ. Especially was it the universal practice to mention Christ, as the object of divine honor, in the *ascription* at the close of prayer,—thus; “For to thee belongs glory, honor, and adoration, and by thee to the Father, in the Holy Spirit, world without end.” Again;—“Through Christ our God and Saviour, by whom be glory and adoration unto thee, in the Holy Ghost, world without end.”—Tertullian, plainly referring to the customary form of doxology to the Trinity, in the close of prayer, rebukes those who attended the Roman games, by asking,—“How they could praise a gladiator, with the same mouth that had united in saying, *εἰς αἰῶνας*, world without end &c. to Christ their God.”

The most customary form of doxology was, “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.” Basil says, this form was used by Irenæus, Clemens, Eusebius, Origen, &c.—and that it was common in all the eastern and western churches. The *occasion* of Basil's saying this, in allusion to the Arian heresy, is important; for it seems that another form of the doxology, “Glory be to the Father *in* or *by* the Son, with the Holy Ghost,” was occasionally used, but without any designed difference of meaning, till Arius adopted this latter form, to denote an inferiority of the Son and Holy Ghost to the Father. And from this time the more exact phraseology was carefully observed by all who did not adhere to the Arian heresy.

#### PRAYING FOR THE DEAD.

Tertullian, in the third century, was the *first* who mentioned



this practice. In the following ages it gradually gained ground; for so enlightened a man as Augustine evidently fell in with this superstition. He not only speaks of the prayers offered for the soul of his mother, Monica, at her funeral; but himself prays for her after death, “that her sins might be forgiven, and that she might rest in peace, with her husband.”

When we consider to what an absurd and impious pitch, this superstition has since been carried, till not only the last mite of the peasant was extorted, but the revenues of princes were put in requisition, to purchase the prayers of a mercenary priesthood, for the repose of the soul after death; it may be proper to inquire briefly, *how* a practice so plainly unscriptural, was introduced into Christian worship. So far as I am able to trace it, the process was substantially the following.

1. The pious example and hopeful death of distinguished Christians, were mentioned in prayer, as they still are, with great propriety, for *the benefit of the living*. And for the same reason, thanks were rendered to God for their holy lives, their triumph over death, and deliverance from sin and sorrow.

2. The transition from this general mention of departed saints, to a direct praying for their souls, was promoted by the *collateral influence of various opinions which obtained currency*. For example; many of the ancients believed the souls of the righteous, between death and the judgment, to be in some place called *Hades* or *Abraham's bosom*, admitted to an imperfect happiness, and waiting, in a sort of probation, for a perfect and endless felicity. The degree of this ultimate felicity, however, they supposed would be modified by the character sustained in this intermediate state, which they regarded as an *appendage* or *continuation* of their earthly probation;—their condition thus rendering them proper objects of prayer to the living.

Coincident with this opinion was another, that in the millennium, Christ would personally reign with his saints on earth; the pious dead being raised for this purpose; and that a part in this

first resurrection, was a blessing for which living Christians might pray in behalf of departed friends.

3. The movings of natural affection, combined with dark and indefinite views respecting hereafter, led to this practice. Death extinguishes the recollection of what was bad, and strengthens the fond remembrance of what was good and endearing in friends while they were living. Praying for them after death, therefore, became among the ancient fathers, a kind of pagano-Christian testimony of love to their characters, and at the same time, of the firmest belief in their immortality.

I will only add that we have, in this case, a new demonstration, from the monstrous doctrine of Popish purgatory, superinduced on an error comparatively harmless at first, that a small deviation from the simple instructions of the Bible, may be fraught with immense dangers to the church.

## LECTURE II.

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### USE OF LITURGIES.

This part of the subject is properly divided into a question of *authority* and a question of *expediency*. The former only belongs to the *history* of prayer.

In the primitive simplicity of the Jewish church, there is no evidence that its worship was conducted by forms; though in its degeneracy, as I have already stated, such forms were introduced and greatly multiplied.

Nor can it be alleged with any plausibility, that a liturgy was prescribed by the authority of Christ, or sanctioned by primitive, apostolic usage in his church. Should any one pretend this, it were reasonable to demand of him;—What has *become* of that liturgy? Who of modern ages has seen it? Who *ever* saw it? It is quite incredible that such a document, had there been one, should not have been preserved, nor alluded to in the New Testament, nor in all the early history of the church.

But it is said, Christ gave his disciples a form of prayer, called the Lord's prayer, and commanded them, "When ye pray, say

—Our Father &c.” Did he then mean to restrict them, on every occasion, to the use of *just so many*, and *just the same words*? If not, there is no ground of controversy. If he did mean this, as some strenuous advocates for liturgies maintain, and must maintain, as essential to their argument from this case, then I ask, by what authority have bishops and councils themselves departed so widely from this brief, simple form of words? If I am sacredly restricted to the language of the “Lord’s prayer,” not two minutes in length, how could I in conscience, use a liturgy of human compilation, larger than the whole New Testament? The truth is, the great Teacher only meant to give a standing example of what constitutes the proper *spirit* and *subjects* of prayer. So the Apostles understood this matter, as their own practice unquestionably shows. So the whole primitive church understood it. Augustine in his one hundred and twenty-first epistle says,—“We are free to ask the same things that are desired in the Lord’s prayer, *aliis atque aliis verbis*,—sometimes in one manner of expression, sometimes in another.”

*When* and *how* then, did Liturgies come into use? I answer promptly, nothing of the kind, that is genuine, can be fixed upon for the first three hundred years after Christ. When the Arian and Pelagian doctrines began seriously to disturb the church, various forms of expression, occasioned by public controversy, gradually insinuated themselves into the language of prayer, and it was deemed necessary by the Council of Laodicea to require, by ecclesiastical regulations, that ministers, instead of using the liberty before enjoyed, should always keep to *one form* of prayer; that is, should not pray, “*pro arbitrio, sed semper easdem preces.*” This form, however, each minister *might compose for himself*, provided that, “before using it, he should consult with learned and experienced brethren.” This regulation was explained, as already in existence, by the Council of Carthage, A. D. 397.—About twenty years after this, that is 416, the council of Milan ordained, that none should use set forms of prayer, except such as were approved in a synod.

The result of my inquiries on this subject is, a full conviction that no forms of prayer were prescribed by public authority till the fifth century. Before this, forms were used, at the option of individual ministers. But Tertullian, speaking expressly of prayer, and of the *Lord's* prayer particularly, says,—“There are many things to be asked *according to the various circumstances of men.*” And again he says,—“*Sine monitore, quia de pectore oramus;—we pray without a monitor, (or set form) because we pray from the heart.*”

There is one *other circumstance, rather incidentally mentioned*, but still, distinctly mentioned, by Clemens Alexandrinus and Tertullian which seems to me, quite decisive against the early use of liturgies. It is this, that the act of *reading* a prayer must employ both the *hands* and *eyes* of the reader;—whereas these fathers say, “We pray with the head lifted up, and the hands stretched out, towards heaven.”

And Origen, in his treatise on prayer, maintains the necessity of *closing the eyes*, to avoid the interruption of external objects. In his treatise *Contra Celsum* too, he says that in prayer “we should *close* the eyes of the body and elevate those of the soul.” Now it must have been a gift next to inspiration that should enable a man to *read* prayers, with his *eyes shut*, and his *hands raised* to heaven. It would be vain to say, that these forms were recited *from memory*; for, besides that this was never the practice of any church, ancient or modern, Bishop Burnet has well said, that after superstition became prevalent, as in the eighth and ninth centuries, there were so many *missals, breviaries, rituals, pontificals, graduals, antiphonals, psalteries*, and a great many more; that the understanding how to officiate became a *hard piece of trade*, not to be learned without long practice. To perform this task by *memory*, was therefore clearly impracticable.

I shall close this historic sketch, with a word respecting the *English Liturgy*.

After the long night of superstition, as the day of the refor-

mation dawned on the church,—it found the clergy *too ignorant* to pray or preach, in a becoming manner. A book of *homilies* was prepared to aid them in preaching; and a book of *prayers*, to be *read* instead of both extemporary devotions, and the Romish liturgy. The English prayer book, however, was *chiefly compiled* from the *Romish*, retaining the superstitions respecting extreme unction, the real presence in the eucharist, praying for the dead, &c. Three years after its first establishment, which was 1547, it underwent such a revision, as to exclude from it the above peculiarities of the Catholics. Several other changes in it were made, at different times, up to 1661,—but no authorised revision has since taken place.\*

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\* At a time when the merits of the English Liturgy were discussed with much zeal and ability, *Bishop Hall*, in a formal defence of it, made the following candid and catholic remarks :

“Far be it from me to dishearten any good Christian from the use of conceived prayer in his *private devotions*, and upon occasions also in *public*. I would hate to be guilty of pouring so much water upon the Spirit, to which I should gladly add oil rather. No, let the full soul freely pour out itself in gracious expressions of its holy thoughts into the bosom of the Almighty; let both the sudden flashes of our quick ejaculations, and the constant flames of our more fixed conceptions mount up from the altar of a zealous heart unto the throne of grace; and if there be some stops or solecisms, in the fervent utterance of our private wants, these are so far from being offensive, that they are the most pleasing music to the ears of that God unto whom our prayers come; let them be broken off with sobs and sighs, and incongruities of our delivery, our good God is no otherways affected to this imperfect elocution, than an indulgent parent is to the clipped and broken language of his dear child, which is more delightful to him than any other’s smooth oratory. This is not to be opposed in another, by any man that hath found the true operations of this grace, in himself.—What I have professed concerning *conceived prayers* is that which I have ever allowed, ever practised, both in private and public. God is a free Spirit, and so should ours be, in pouring out our voluntary devotions upon all occasions; nothing hinders but that this liberty and a public liturgy should be good friends, and go hand in hand together; and whosoever would forcibly separate them, let them bear their own blame—the over-vigorous pressing of the liturgy, to the justling out of preaching or *conceived prayers*, was never intended either by the law-makers, or moderate governors of the church.”

Having despatched the question as to *authority* in favor of liturgies, as derived from the Bible, or the usage of the church ;—we can hardly dismiss the topic of set forms in prayer, without looking at the other point which I mentioned, namely the question of *expediency*.

The arguments in favor of liturgies, are summarily such as the following.

1. It is said if they are not *enjoined* in the Bible, still they are not *prohibited* ; but are at least allowable to those who think there are good reasons for using them. On this point there can be no dispute. It must denote great ignorance or prejudice in any one to say that God has *forbidden* forms. He has not legislated on this subject, one way or the other ; any more than he has determined in what *language* a minister shall pray ;—or what *version of the Psalms* shall be read ;—or what *tunes* shall be sung ; or whether the sermon shall be on a short text or a long one,—shall be a written or unwritten discourse. One man can preach well without a manuscript ;—another cannot preach at all, in this manner. One needs spectacles to read the Bible ;—to another, they would be an incumbrance. Every one, not troubled with an over scrupulous conscience, on things indifferent, will be satisfied with two maxims of Paul ;—“ Let every one be persuaded in his own mind ;” and “ Let all things be done decently and in order.”

2. It is said that great *irregularities and improprieties occur in extempore prayer*, which are avoided by forms. It is certain that ignorance, affectation, eccentricity, or indiscreet zeal, may lead to sentiments and forms of expression, in prayer, chargeable with irreverence, if not absurdity. I suppose too, that all who have been accustomed to listen to extempore prayers, have sometimes been pained with embarrassment, and hesitation in the speaker ; or have known him turn aside from the proper business of devotion, to give a compliment or reproof to some one present. Well written forms may doubtless provide against irregularities arising from diffidence, unequal abilities in minis-

ters, or "uncertain frames, which vary with the caprice of circumstances.

3. It is said, that the propriety of forms in prayer is virtually admitted, by all who use *precomposed psalms* or *hymns*, in their devotions; these being in fact *forms* of prayer and praise. The late Mr. Newton of London, who, though an Episcopalian, had as little bigotry as any other man, treats this grave subject in a strain of pleasantry;

"Crito freely will rehearse  
Forms of prayer and praise in verse;  
Why should Crito then suppose,  
Forms are sinful when in prose?"

"I have heard," he adds, "of a minister, who used to compose *hymns*, 'pro re nata,' in the pulpit, giving out one line, and then another, as the congregation proceeded in the singing. If I were persuaded, (he continues,) that forms are unlawful in prayer, and yet approved of *singing* in public worship, I should greatly covet the talent of *extempore hymn-making*, that I might maintain consistency in the whole service."

It should be remarked, however, that this reasoning is rather specious than solid. For a *hymn*, as well as a *tune*, must be precomposed, or it could not be *sung* in *concert* by a choir. The same *word*, on the same *note* must be uttered at one breath by different voices; to do which *extempore*, would be impossible. But *praying* is not an *art*, in the same sense. Only *one* voice is heard; and both thought and language, may be, and often *should* be really "*pro re nata*." If Mr. Newton had carried through his argument, and proposed that *tunes* should be composed *extempore*, and sung in concert, he must have seen its fallacy.

On the other hand it is alleged *against* forms, and in favor of *extempore* prayers,

1. That forms are inconsistent with freedom and fervency in devotion. It is said that they tend to produce a *dry, cold*,



*formal* mode of praying; and that in fact a precomposed prayer, even if *written* by a devout man for his *own use*, is readily distinguished by his fellow worshippers from a prayer that comes at the moment warm from the heart. Accordingly it is said by one accustomed to both modes of worship in England, "I never saw any Dissenting congregation appear half so irreverent and unaffected in prayer, as I have seen those who attend the service of the Established church."

2. Extemporary prayer is not necessarily nor commonly extravagant in manner. For the few cases of this sort that can be named, at least among educated ministers, there is a great counterbalance of those whose prayers are characterized by pertinence, propriety, and solemnity. And why should it be otherwise? when, as Baxter says, "Any man, if he is hungry, can beg for bread; or if he needs it, ask help of a physician, or lawyer, or landlord, as well without a studied form as with it. A very child, if he sees but a pedlar's pack opened, where there are abundance of things which he desireth, will learn without book to say, *O father, give me this, and give me that.* So will the soul that seeth the treasures of Christ. He that knoweth God and his works, and knoweth his own sins and wants, is acquainted with the best *prayer-book.*"

3. No set of forms can be framed sufficiently *various*, to correspond with the endless diversity of circumstances, in which men are placed. The attempt to regulate the *social intercourse* of men in this way would be deemed preposterous. How could a man maintain an argument, or despatch his business in market, or converse with his friend, if he must know beforehand every word that is to be spoken? How could the concerns of a *family* be conducted in this manner, for a single day? And why should men, in expressing their desires to their father in heaven, forbear to vary their language, with changing circumstances? So inconsistent are set forms with the free out-pouring of the heart before God, that they must greatly tend to damp the spirit of real prayer. It is difficult to conceive how social prayer

meetings, *in a revival of religion*, could be conducted by a book of forms. Should such an experiment be made, doubtless the revival would die, or the prayer book be laid aside. I presume that even in *families*, this restricted use of forms has a decided tendency to destroy the spirit, if not ultimately the form itself of devotion. Accordingly, it is probable that in three fourths of the families of Christendom, that have daily family prayer, it is performed without book.

4. There is, on the whole, *more danger of embarrassment*, in praying by forms, than without them. What if the dim-sighted minister should at the moment of commencing his book-prayer, lose his spectacles? Job Orton says, "I have sometimes felt pain, at the *hesitations of Dissenting* ministers, but much *more* at the blunders of those who *read* prayers." He then speaks of being at a funeral, where the officiating clergyman was a most devout minister, who had read the burial service about one hundred times a year for forty years successively. Yet he says, "The candles held at the grave, being almost blown out, this worthy man could not, or would not repeat without book, the two last Collects, but blundered in the most painful manner."

Bishop Patrick was eminent, when young, for fervor in prayer. When advanced in age, he visited an old Dissenting friend, and was requested to lead in family devotions. But having long been accustomed to forms, he was so embarrassed, that he rose from his knees, with an apology to the family; and received from his friend this plain rebuke, "You have made a sad exchange for your lawn sleeves and mitre." Baxter says, "the man who has neglected to walk, till he has lost the use of his legs, is in a bad condition, if his coach and crutches are taken from him."

The foregoing remarks on the history of public prayer, and the use of liturgies, seemed to demand a place, in discussing a subject which has been much controverted, and which should be once at least, examined by every man who is entering on the solemn, official duties of the ministry.

## LECTURE III.

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### GENERAL DIRECTIONS.

We come now to a much more important view of the subject, the *proper performance of public prayer*, as a duty devolved on the Christian minister.

And here I shall follow the course of my own thoughts, and under several heads of advice, offer you such remarks as have been suggested to my observation, during my own experience in the sacred office.

1. *Remember that*, YOUR AMOUNT OF USEFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY, DEPENDS IN NO SMALL MEASURE ON THE CHARACTER OF YOUR PUBLIC PRAYERS. These will have an important influence on your success in preaching.

If you should fall into the habit of supposing that nearly all your work in the pulpit consists in delivering good sermons, you will make a serious mistake. Preaching is only the *means* of religion; prayer is a part of *religion itself*. No office, in which a mere man can be employed, is so elevated and awful as that of him who is the organ of a whole assembly, in addressing their supplications to God. In preaching he speaks for God to men; in prayer, for men to God. But with what hope

of success does he *preach*, unless God bestow his blessing? In vain might an Apostle or an angel, deliver the messages of heaven, to men dead in trespasses and sins, unless the truth is accompanied by the divine and sanctifying efficacy of the Holy Spirit. But this gracious influence is given in answer to prayer; and the prayer that is to bring down this blessing on a congregation, is offered by that congregation, through the lips of the very man who knows, and acknowledges in the act of prayer, that all his other services will be utterly fruitless without success in this.

When the devotions of the sanctuary have their proper effect, they prepare the hearers to listen with deep and solemn interest to the instructions delivered from the pulpit. Just so far as the prayer, in which they have joined, has brought them to feel the impressions of a present God, in the Sanctuary, and the eternal retributions to which they are going, their minds are divested of listlessness, and prejudice, and fastidious criticism, and they will hear a sermon with candor and humility.

Besides,—what is it that gives a *sermon power* over the hearts of the hearers? It is a solemn persuasion that the preacher himself is deeply impressed, with the everlasting importance of the truths which he delivers. But *how* shall they be thus persuaded, unless the thing is a reality? And how shall the minister deeply feel the weight of truth in his *sermon*, if his heart has been cold, in *preparing* that sermon,—and cold in the devotional exercises that have gone before it? \* That heart

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\* The following form was drawn up by Dr. Doddridge in his younger years, and prefixed to his book of hints on skeletons of Sermons.

“Blessed God! It is thou that gavest me a rational soul, and upon thee do I depend entirely for the continuance of those capacities with which thou hast endowed me. I am not sufficient of myself, so much as to think any thing as I ought, but all my sufficiency is of thee.

“I am now engaging in a work of singular importance, in which I would desire to be sensible of the need I have of thy gracious assistance. I beg thou wilt command my attention to the affair before me. May no vain or intruding thoughts break in upon me, to hinder a steady application to my business. Direct my mind to proper

which slumbers in speaking to God, and wakes up in speaking to men, has but a false and factitious warmth, which in its influence on other hearts, is totally different from the genuine glow of religious feeling. There may be reasons why a man should be fervent in his devotions, and yet fail of delivering an interesting sermon. But the converse is a much more rare occurrence, namely, that the hearers are disappointed by an impressive and powerful sermon, from the same lips that had just uttered a dull and formal prayer. If you would be a successful *preacher*, you must not *fail essentially*, in public prayers.

2. *If you would pray well* IN PUBLIC, YOU MUST BE A DEVOUT MAN. This is by far the most important advice that belongs to the subject; indeed if this one point is attained, all other directions are comparatively needless. The *habit* of a man's piety is *every thing* as to his devotional performances in the pulpit. To expect that he will be fervent in these, if he neglects communion with God from day to day, is just as unreasonable as to expect that the racer will win the prize on the day of trial, if his limbs are crippled by want of exercise, every other day of the year.

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thoughts, and to the most agreeable manner of arranging and expressing them. And may my heart be inflamed with pious affections; that divine truths coming warm from my own soul may more easily penetrate into the souls of my hearers. May I remember that I am not to compose an harangue to acquire to myself the reputation of an eloquent orator; but that I am preparing food for precious and immortal souls, and dispensing that sacred gospel which my Redeemer brought from heaven, and sealed with his blood. May I therefore sincerely endeavor to give my discourse the most useful turn; and do thou direct me so to form it, as best to promote the great purpose of Christian edification.

“And grant, O Lord, that I may receive present refreshment to myself, and future edification from the study of those divine truths I am entering upon; and may this be one of the most delightful employments of my life. While I am watering others may I be watered myself also, and bring forth daily more and more fruit, proportionable to the advantages which I enjoy, to the glory of thy great name, and the improvement of my everlasting felicity, through Jesus Christ. Amen.”

If you should say, “I know full well that to pray in public with comfort to myself or edification to others, I must maintain the habit of devotional feeling; but how am I to *do* this?” I answer, do it as you would advise any plain Christian to do the same thing. There are the same laws both of animal and spiritual life for a minister, as for another man. To sustain his bodily powers he must breathe, and eat, and sleep, and exercise, as well as his neighbor. To keep alive the spirit of piety in his own soul, he must adopt the same means that would be proper for his neighbor, in aiming at the same end. What these are, you could easily tell a friend, who should ask your advice. Do then as you would direct him to do. “Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?”

Make it a point of conscience then to be serious, earnest, and stated in your secret devotions. I say *serious* and *earnest*;—for of all the dangerous experiments by which a man might try to harden his own heart, none probably would be more fatally successful, than to maintain secret prayer as a *mere form*. The heart that is accustomed to sleep or trifle, in its solemn approaches to God, may well be expected to find apology for its insensibility, or its irreverence, in any other religious service.

I say *stated*; for, as I have already remarked, in another part of these Lectures, on the duty of *cultivating spiritual habits*,—men who have carried their attainments in experimental religion, to the highest pitch, have found it indispensable to maintain *regularity*, in their seasons of private devotion. Consult any deeply experimental writer on this subject, like Flavel or Howe;—ask any devout Christian, and you will find but one sentiment. There is but one among ourselves;—for let me repeat the fact here, that when I have put this question, in private conversations as I have often done, to members of our Seminary; “How far have you found the spirit of your secret devotions, to depend on *regularity*, as to times set apart for the purpose?”—the almost unanimous answer has been, “I can do *nothing* in the duties of the closet without *regularity*.”

Let no pressure of study or business intrude on your

closet. Forego your *meals* rather than your *devotions*; —that will give you a *meagre body*, but this, *leanness of soul*. At the same time, think it not enough, if you should withstand the enemy, that would drive you from the closet, while yet you suffer that enemy to rush with you into it. Jerome says ‘the heart never does its work well, when preoccupied with other things.’

I will add that the spiritual habits of the soul must be *consistent*. The man who should live on a regular and salutary diet, and yet take a small dose of poison daily, would carry a sickly countenance. And he who is exact in his seasons of prayer, and yet violates his conscience in some other point of duty, will not grow in communion with God.

After all your pains to cultivate a habit of devotional feeling, should you sometimes find, (as doubtless you may, through bodily infirmity, and other causes,) a sluggish spirit in *public* prayer, mourn over it, and strive against it. Search for the causes of such a state, and avoid them. Call that heart to account, that dares to slumber in its solemn approaches to Jehovah. When you stand up to pray in the sanctuary, remember that the immortal interests of a whole assembly, are to be carried before God; that you are to ask at his hands infinite blessings, without which, they and you are lost forever. Pray, as becomes a dying man. Pray, as becomes a minister of the gospel, surrounded by dying men, who are hastening to the judgment. Pray, as one that sees heaven open, and hell without a covering, —and the Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory, and all nations gathered before him. Pray, as one that has been *accustomed* to pray in the closet; as one that has often mourned for sin in secret, and looked to the bloody scene of Calvary, to an atoning and interceding Redeemer, and a sanctifying Spirit, for help.

I proceed now to other directions in which my remarks will be more various.

3. *Let the MATTER of your prayers correspond to CIRCUMSTANCES, AND TO THE OBJECTS FOR WHICH YOU PRAY.*

I speak not here of prayers strictly *occasional*, which will be noticed in another place. But I refer especially to those prayers which constitute a considerable part of public worship, and which in modern churches precede the delivery of sermons.

Now I apprehend there is no point in which intelligent Christians so often feel a deficiency in the public prayers of ministers, as in *want of matter*. To guard against this deficiency, consider that, in most of these prayers, the requests to be offered, are suggested in part, by the circumstances of an assembly, convened *on the day* set apart for the public, solemn worship of God, in the sanctuary;—an assembly of *sinners* too, convened to be instructed from the oracles of God, respecting their duty to him, their own character, and the way of salvation. Such an assembly, met for such a purpose, in such circumstances;—embracing all varieties of moral condition, from the hardened unbeliever, to the mature Christian, standing on the threshold of heaven; and all these, dying men, and destined to an eternal hereafter;—such an assembly have various, solemn, urgent wants to be presented before the mercy seat. To some of these individuals, the present season of prayer, may be the last that will be granted. Others may live many years, and their lives, in a thousand ways, be connected with the interests of their country and the church of God.

I glance at these topics to show, that the range of matter for public prayer is *boundless*. In this exercise you are not *confined*, as in a sermon, to *one* subject, but *ought* to touch on *many*. With a warm heart therefore and a tolerable readiness of utterance, you need not be dry and barren.

As a farther security on this head, I advise you to make the proper subjects of prayer, a business of serious reflection. Go, first of all, to the Bible, the great storehouse of devotional thoughts; and next, to such spiritual writers as Flavel, Owen, Baxter, Watts, and, (instar omnium, for this purpose,) Henry.

4. *Your METHOD should exhibit a PROPER CONNEXION AND TRANSITION, in the parts of prayer,—yet without studied formality.* A solemn petition to a human magistrate, would not be



respectful without order. A solemn address to God especially, ought not to be a *rhapsody*, made up of incoherent thoughts. Something of order and connexion is indispensable also to prevent vacuity of matter, repetition, confusion and undue length. Indeed no man of sense can speak, on any occasion, without more or less of *method* in his thoughts. It is generally best for young preachers to have some regard to the usual arrangement, viz.—Invocation, Confession, Petition, Intercession, and Thanksgiving. So much at least is true, that the principal prayer, on the sabbath, could not properly begin with supplications for rulers, or missionaries, or the heathen. Nor can the different subjects of prayer be intermingled by a continual alternation. Yet, while the *desultory habit*, of speaking on at random, which some men contract, is undesirable, a rigid *uniformity* of method is not expedient. The flow of the heart, though somewhat irregular, is far better than a mechanical exactness. “It is possible,” says the pious Newton, “to learn to *pray by rule*; but it is hardly possible to do so with acceptance and benefit to others. The studied addresses with which some approach the throne of grace, remind us of a stranger’s coming to a great man’s door. He knocks and waits, sends in his name, and goes through a course of ceremony, before he gains admittance; while a child of the family uses no ceremony at all, but enters freely, because he is at home.” Orton says that while he thinks premeditation to be proper as to the general drift of prayer, he had for many years left off the exact attention to method, which he used to practise; endeavoring only to have his mind, before engaging in the exercise, deeply impressed with the solemn truths of religion. The same course, he says, was adopted by Dr. Scott, one of the wisest and devoutest men of his acquaintance.

5. *Your LANGUAGE in prayer should BE ADAPTED TO THE SOLEMNITY OF DEVOTION.* It should possess, in the first place, *simplicity*. It scarcely need be said that I do not mean *vulgarity*. On the bad taste, and even irreverence of mingling *low words, and low colloquial phrases*, in a solemn address to God,

I shall presume that no cautions are necessary.\* There is another danger to which I do not say educated, but *half-educated* men, are much more liable, and from which very respectable ministers are not wholly free; I mean the ostentation of a *learned* phraseology. Sometimes this appears in long and sounding *words*; sometimes in elegant structure of *sentences*; sometimes in vivid rhetorical figures.

Avoid *poetical* prayers. In one instance I heard a stanza, from Watts' version of the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, repeated verbatim in prayer. In another case, I heard one of the obscurest lines in Young's *Night Thoughts*, quoted in the same manner, and that by a minister of a large, city congregation. Of committing yourselves such glaring improprieties, I trust you are in no danger; but the spirit of devotion will flag, just in proportion as you study rotundity and cadence, or display of imagination.

Avoid *scholastic exactness*. It is a real fault to violate grammar in prayer; but a much greater one, to speak to your Maker in such a kind of air, as to remind your fellow worshippers, continually, that you have not only studied *syntax*, but are familiar with the *canons of rhetoric*. The sacrifices of God are not pomp nor accuracy of language, but a "broken spirit." It is remarkable how little of *starch*, or *display* of any sort, it takes to spoil a prayer.

But simplicity is not enough; there must, in the second place, be *fervor* too. The *language* of devotion should be a pouring out of the heart to God, and not a discourse to men. The man who

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\* This is left just as it was written, when the Lecture was composed. Before that time I had *heard* of extreme cases, in which ignorant fanatics had outraged all decorum, by *rustic vulgarity of language*, in addresses to God. Since that time, however, facts have come to my knowledge, showing that I was not authorised to presume all admonition unnecessary on this subject, to men sustaining a regular standing in the ministry. There is a class of men, who carry what they call *importunity* in prayer, to that degree of *impudence*, and *coarse effrontery* of language, which is distressing to every humble and devout worshipper.

deeply feels his own guilt as a sinner, and the infinite value of the blessings which he comes before God to ask, will of course be *earnest* in his supplications. The breathings of such a soul, in communion with God, will exhibit the warmth of pious feeling, in the direct language of confession, petition, or praise. I say *direct* language, for good men are sometimes so *didactic* in prayer, that they seem to be *instructing their Maker*, rather than *asking blessings* from him. Or if they mean to give instruction to their fellow worshippers, they forget that the proper place for this is the sermon, and not the prayer.

The *didactic* manner in prayer, often arises from mere want of skill or taste, in the form of expression employed. A man sometimes says, for example,—“ Our life is short, our work is great,—we know not what a day may bring forth ; ”—“ teach us then so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” But thoughts which are no part of a petition, and only *incidental* to it, should be expressed not in the *didactic* or *affirmative*, but in the *incidental* way ; thus,—“ *While* we are so often admonished that our time is short, and our work great, and *while* we know not what a day may bring forth, —teach us so to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Now the surest method of avoiding all the defects in expression, to which I have just alluded, is to make a free use of *scriptural* phraseology. This has important advantages over any language of our own. It is familiar to all ; it inspires reverence ; it bears repetition, without becoming trite or tedious. Addison, whose taste deserves much respect, on such a subject, says ; “ There is a certain coldness in the phrases of European languages, compared with the oriental forms of speech. The English tongue has received innumerable improvements from an infusion of Hebraisms, derived out of the practical passages in holy writ. They warm and animate our language, give it force and energy, and convey our thoughts in ardent and intense phrases. There is something in this kind of diction, that often sets the mind in a flame, and makes our hearts burn within us.

How cold and dead is a prayer composed in the most elegant forms of speech, when it is not heightened by that solemnity of phrase which may be drawn from the sacred writings."

But while every preacher should aim at this invaluable excellence, it by no means follows that every *part* of the scriptures may be properly wrought into the language of prayer. Pious ministers often err here, through want of discrimination; and cite passages so oriental in cast, so darkly metaphorical, or for other reasons so obscure, as to convey no meaning to common minds. Instead of multiplying examples, as might easily be done,—I would simply ask, what does a congregation suppose a minister to mean, and what does he mean, when he prays for "the blessings of the upper and the nether springs?" When he prays that the heathen may "cast away their idols,"—the petition is quite intelligible; but when he adds to it, that they may "cast them to the moles and to the bats," what is he supposed to mean? and what does he mean? What does he mean, when he prays that we may be kept from "sacrificing to our own net and drag?"

There is another fault in using scriptural language when we pray, which consists in such a mutilation of this language, as is sometimes called *ministerial scripture*. A few examples of this sort, may stand instead of a complete enumeration of the passages referred to. "Hear ye the rod, and who hath appointed it," is turned into, "Kiss the rod, and him that hath appointed it," a phrase nowhere in the Bible. "Prone to sin as the sparks fly upward," is used for "born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." "Exalted to heaven, in point of privilege," is another example. "In many things we all offend, and in all things come short of the glory of God," is another. Paul's words respecting the resurrection of the body, are often violently wrested, by being applied to a preached word; "It is sown in weakness, may it be raised in power."

6. *Next to language, in prayer, I will remark briefly on EXTERNAL MANNER, INCLUDING COUNTENANCE, ATTITUDE AND VOICE.*

The expression of the face should be tranquil and placid, in distinction from that distortion of features, which indicates mental perturbation or distress. The eyes should be closed. The reason for this, as already cited from Origen, is one of universal application, namely, the interruption of devotional feeling, arising from various objects that must meet the eye, if it is open. In the only case, in which I have seen a preacher carelessly surveying his audience, while repeating a memoriter prayer, there was something inexpressibly revolting to my feelings. Another kind of pain I have more frequently experienced in this case, from observing the fixed, paralytic glare, or the spasmodic vibration of the *half-closed* eye.

The *body* should be erect, without any of the violent writhings practised by the Turks, and by some Christian fanatics, in their devotions. The *hands* should generally recline on the pulpit, with no other motion than such as denotes gravity and humility. In earnest prayer, they are sometimes spontaneously folded on the breast, or elevated and inverted. In Jewish and oriental phraseology, as I before said, “lifting up of the hands” —is synonymous with prayer.

The *voice* should be in its natural or middle key;—not so high as to endanger its breaking; nor so low as to frustrate articulation and variety. Let the *quantity* of voice in prayer be such as to fill the place in which you are. “The end of speaking is *to be heard*.” If you fail of this, you might better be silent. If you are heard imperfectly, you will be heard with impatience. The extreme of *vociferation*, is however a still greater fault, especially in the beginning of prayer;—because it denotes want of reverence, or at least of that religious sensibility, which is the best guide to propriety in manner. But all directions must be useless to a man who does not *instinctively feel*, that the loudness in prayer, which may be *necessary* in a spacious church, would startle and stun the hearers, if used in family devotions, or at a common meal.

I would say the same thing concerning *inflections* of voice; for if a man does not *instinctively feel* the difference that is

called for, between the intonations of prayer, and those which are proper in telling a story, or making a bargain, nothing that I could say would instruct him on the subject.

One remark however on *cadence* is important. While a devotional exercise does not require nor allow that variety of emphasis and inflection, which belongs to other branches of rhetorical delivery, especially the colloquial, your manner will certainly be heavy, if you utter yourself in short sentences, each of which begins with a full explosion of sound, and is closed with a cadence that is low, uniformly terminating on the same note. Avoid this habit ;—and I have no advice to add, respecting voice, only that your articulation be clear, your rate deliberate, and your whole pronunciation, grave, solemn, and earnest.

## LECTURE IV.

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### FAULTS IN PRAYER.

Various faults in prayer, which hardly fall under any of the foregoing heads, require some notice, and I here arrange them together, that they may not seem to be overlooked.

These I preface with the general remark, that whatever faults belong to the public prayers of a minister, they are not only less likely to be known to *himself* than to *other* men, but less likely to be known to himself, than *other faults* of his own. Aside from the insensible influence of habit, on which I am to remark immediately, there is a sacredness and delicacy about this subject which repels criticism.

1. *The first fault to be mentioned, is an improper HABIT AS TO LENGTH, in prayer.* I speak of habit, because its influence becomes specially important in an exercise where the mind is supposed to be absorbed in elevated thought, and therefore to be less capable of adjusting its movements to definite limits than in common cases. Be the reason what it may, (and I presume the above is the true reason,) the fact is beyond doubt, that *no man is conscious of his own length* in prayer. I have known

very respectable ministers, who, after repeated admonition, and serious resolutions, on this point, have still exceeded, by one third, or one half, the time which they prescribed to themselves. The consequence of this fact is another, that we are more likely as a general thing, to err on the side of *length*, than on that of *brevity*. To fix on the proper limits, either for a sermon or prayer, some respect must be had to *usage* in a congregation. To fall much short of the customary length, sometimes revolts the feelings of the best people; to go much beyond this, may produce weariness and impatience. A prayer before sermon may vary from ten to twelve or fifteen minutes; but should never extend to thirty or forty, as has often been the case, in this country, and in England. Orton, in his *Letters to a young Clergyman*, says, that —“Many pious souls complain of it, as an impracticable thing, especially for the infirm and the aged, to keep their attention fixed for half an hour or longer; and that some ministers, whom he has known to pray full forty minutes, have spoiled rather than promoted the devotions of their own people, besides exciting in others a prejudice against extemporary prayer.”—Whitefield rebuked a brother for the same fault, by saying—“You prayed me *into* a good frame, and you prayed me *out* of it.”

John Newton, who daily breathed the atmosphere of heaven, said, “The chief fault of some good prayers is, that they are *too long*;—not that we should pray by the clock; but it is better the hearers should wish the prayer had been longer, than spend half the time in wishing it were over. There are doubtless seasons when the Lord favors those who pray, with a “wrestling spirit,” so that they hardly know how to leave off. They who join in these prayers are seldom wearied. But it sometimes happens, that we spin out our time to the greatest length, when we have in reality the least to say.” In confirmation of this last remark, I add a similar one from the late Rev. Jeremiah Hallock, of Connecticut,—whom I used to think more like Jesus Christ than any other minister of my acquaintance. He once said to me, in a revival of religion,—“I do my



errand at the throne of grace, the most directly, when I have the best spirit of prayer.”

It were little to our purpose, on such a subject, to quote the opinions of men to whom prayer is always a burden; but the judgment of *holy* men, who were ripe for heaven while on earth, may well deserve our regard.

The most general precaution against undue length, is, to remember that you are never called on any one occasion to mention *all* the topics of prayer. Some you must omit at one time, and some at another; while many that are mentioned, can have but a passing notice. Avoid, especially, great *particularity*, in dwelling on the cases of *individuals* and *families* who request public prayers. The prayer *after sermon* may differ in length from two to three or four minutes.

2. *Another of the faults, which I shall mention, consists in the FREQUENT RECURRENCE OF FAVORITE WORDS AND SET FORMS OF EXPRESSION.* Names and titles of God, with epithets referring to his attributes, as *almighty, merciful, holy, glorious* &c. are repeated in some prayers so needlessly, and so often, as to be divested not only of solemnity, but of significance. If the word *Jehovah* might not be spoken by a Jew, without prostration, it is at least irreverent in us, to repeat it in every sentence, as a careless expletive. “*Though this is not,*” as Newton says, “*taking the name of God in vain, in the usual sense of the phrase, it is a great impropriety.*”

Another form of the same fault consists in a constant recurrence of such phrases as, “*We beseech thee,*”—“*We pray thee,*” &c.—instead of expressing the petition directly, without any prefatory clause. The great infelicity of this habit is, that it apparently aims to provide in each sentence, a resting place for the mind, while it reflects on what shall follow. The consequence is, that the speaker has an apparent and commonly a real *hesitation*, instead of that freedom and fluency, which give interest to devotion. And this difficulty is apt to be exactly proportioned to the *length* of these interjected clauses. If the mind of the speaker rests, while the tongue says, “*We pray*

*thee*,"—the remainder of the sentence may perhaps go on without a break ; but if the mind rests, very often, while the tongue repeats a long periphrastic clause, such as ;—" *We humbly beseech thee, most merciful God*,"—both mind and tongue, probably, will make a perceptible stop, at the end of this clause. The sensation of languor is unavoidable in an assembly, if a quarter of the time is occupied in a round of words, which are felt to be *no part of prayer*, but only successive *preparations* to pray. And the usual *hesitation* of this manner, adds greatly to the difficulty.

To the same class of faults belongs the excessive use of the interjection *O*. This should always denote *emotion*, and is never proper, except when followed by a title of God, in the vocative case, or the direct language of earnest petition. It is a great extreme to begin, as some do, nearly every sentence with this intensive particle, as ; " *O, we beseech thee ;*"—" *O, we bless thee ;*"—" *O, we are sinners.*" And the case is still worse, when this intensive phraseology is often made out by the help of an expletive verb, as " *O, we do beseech thee ;*"—" *O, we do bless thee.*"

3. Injudicious use of *pauses*, is another fault which often occurs in prayer. I have already mentioned freedom and fluency as especially desirable in this duty. There is nothing which so fatally destroys the influence upon common minds of what is spoken in public, as the appearance of *hesitation* in the speaker. They always ascribe it to a dulness of conception, or flutter of spirits, which excites their compassion, or at least diminishes their respect. In a devotional exercise, the influence is much worse than in any other kind of speaking. Whatever apology, in behalf of a very young preacher, may be made by his fellow worshippers, still, they will inevitably lose all interest in his prayer, if he proceeds in it with difficulty himself.

In some cases where there is no special mismanagement as to *pauses*, the speaker may inflict pain on his hearers, amounting in some cases to distress, by unskilfully going back, to correct some slight verbal mistake, in what he had uttered. This unavoidably fixes the attention of his fellow worshippers, on what

might otherwise have passed without notice. If there is neither *impiety* nor *absurdity* in his language, though it may not have been happily chosen, to correct the mistake, is generally worse than to let it alone.

The *same pauses* are required in prayer, as in any other kind of grave delivery; and for the same reasons,—to distinguish the sense, and to give opportunity for taking breath. But when pauses are made between words, too closely connected to admit of any pause, it occasions an appearance of embarrassment, which the hearers certainly observe in prayer, and certainly observe with pain. For example, men who know nothing of grammar, instinctively feel that an adjective signifies nothing, without a substantive. When a speaker utters an adjective, his mind is supposed already to have conceived the substantive to which it belongs. If he makes a pause, then, between the adjective and the substantive, it implies that he had begun to utter a thought not finished in his own mind. The case is the same with other grammatical correlates, standing in immediate connexion,—as the auxiliary and its principal verb, the preposition and the noun it governs, the active verb and its objective. Suppose a preacher, then, to utter this sentence in prayer with these pauses;—“ We entreat thee in . . . thy great mercy to grant . . . us grace, that we may . . . turn from our manifold . . . transgressions and live.” *All* these unnatural pauses no one would be *likely* to make in *one sentence*. But one or other of them would probably be adopted by him, who had acquired the unfortunate and needless habit, which I am condemning.

Perhaps I ought to mention another thing, which occurs in the language of prayer, and on account of which, I have often observed young preachers to proceed with difficulty. I refer to the too abundant use of sentences, in which the *relative with its adjuncts* constitutes a member, or perhaps a series of members. Hence it happens very frequently, that while the speaker's mind conceives exactly the thought to be expressed in the *beginning* of such a complex sentence, he is thrown into embarrassment, in making out its subsequent parts. For example; it would be

a simple petition, easily uttered in prayer, to say,—“ Help us to regard with the deepest reverence, the solemn admonitions of thy word.” But if the speaker has acquired the habit of phraseology just alluded to, his form of expression would perhaps be,—“ Help us to regard, with *that* reverence *which* ——— *those* solemn admonitions of thy word, *which* ———.” The blanks are left after the relatives, to suggest the difficulty intended in my remarks. These might each be filled with forms of expression very different, and yet perfectly proper. Which of these forms shall be adopted, must cost the mind a momentary effort to determine ; and this is the precise point at which *hesitation* is very liable to occur.

In regard to fluency of utterance, I may add, that it is out of question, when a prayer consists of *detached sentences*, in which there is no current of thought or feeling. These generally begin with some auxiliary verb, as *may* or *let*, or some set phrase ; while each sentence is independent of every other, and all follow successively, with a *uniform cadence*. Whereas, if the speaker introduces successively, some *topic* or *train of thought*, to which different sentences refer, through a paragraph ; and these sentences begin with words that have meaning,—perhaps with a principal verb, as ; “ *show us,—teach us,—guide us,—sanctify us ;* ”—&c.—the monotonous, heavy manner is avoided.

4. Another fault, is *too great familiarity*, in addresses to God. Some acquire the habit, as Newton says, “ of talking to the Lord,”—in much the same careless manner, as to language and voice, as though they were addressing a fellow worm. “ A man in pleading for his life before an earthly king, would speak with seriousness and reverence ;—much more is this proper in speaking to the King of Kings.” Zealous and fanatical men have acquired an unseemly boldness, in this respect, from some things in a kind of sacred, pastoral poetry ; and in such poetico-prose writings as Mrs. Rowe’s *Devout Exercises* ;—and in the example of some eccentric preachers, such as Whitefield. It is not uncommon to hear from those whose devout feelings are unquestionable, such expressions as these ; “ Dearest Jesus, come and sit

down with us, at the table which thou hast spread ;”—“Come and make one with us.” “The Apostles,” says a sensible writer, “will not be thought cold or lukewarm, in love to their divine Master. Yet they never prefixed to his name *fondling epithets*.” They were too sensible of the infinite distance between him and themselves, to venture on such irreverence. They spoke to him, and of him, in terms not of equal familiarity, but of respectful and awful veneration. Let those who are accustomed to use such phrases as, “dear God,” and “dear Jesus,” study the example of the Apostles.

5. I have already glanced at the *language of censure*, and of *compliment*, as being improper in prayer. On the latter point, a few additional remarks are required. I suppose there can be no doubt, that on the simple principles of the gospel, *flattery* is wrong, in all cases. Suppose then, as pastor of a congregation, you make the closing prayer on the sabbath, after a brother in the ministry has kindly preached for you through the day. You allude to his sermons in terms, such as worldly politeness employs on common subjects, that is, in terms of direct *compliment*. In thus cancelling an obligation to a fellow worm, do you not offend against the sanctity of the place and the occasion, and the dignity, (so to speak,) of devotion? I have no doubt that intelligent and conscientious people often feel on this point, a degree of impropriety, in the habits of ministers; and the same habits are sometimes carried to a greater extreme, in more private devotions, such as acknowledging the hospitalities of families.

6. The practice of some excellent ministers, to introduce into public prayer, a *direct reference to their individual infirmities and sins*, I consider as improper. My first reason is, that this is turning aside from the common ground, in which the devotions of an assembly can unite. To acknowledge the insufficiency of all *means* in themselves, and the weakness and unworthiness of human instruments, is proper. To implore divine assistance in the dispensation of the word, and the divine blessing to give it efficacy, is of course proper. The whole *assembly can unite*, in such expressions of Christian feeling. But if

the preacher goes into confessions of his *own individual* weaknesses and sins, can the assembly join in his confessions?—or shall they *suspend* their devotions in the meantime?

There is a second difficulty on this point. The decorum belonging to the pulpit, makes it less proper for the preacher, than for any other public speaker, to bring *himself* into view in any prominent manner. Hence, as I have before remarked, personal apologies, which might be proper perhaps in a secular oration, could not be tolerated in a sermon. For obvious reasons, every thing of this sort is still less tolerable in prayer. But if I mistake not, the preacher's confessions to God of his own infirmities and defects, often have the aspect of an *apology to the audience*. For myself, I must say, that the most marked cases of this sort which I have witnessed, have made an instinctive impression on my mind, even from childhood, of something like *ostentatious humility*.

I have left myself room in the close of these Lectures, for only a few hints of advice, as to *occasional prayers*. The most general one is, *shun yourself, at all events, things which you have marked as prominent faults in the prayers of your brethren*. For example, why should the whole body of ministers, from year to year, speak with impatience of the customary *length in ordination prayers*, and yet each one in turn, be both complainer and transgressor? Consistency requires, that he should excuse his *brother*, for praying fifteen or twenty minutes, instead of five, at the opening or close of an ordination, or else should forbear to do so *himself*.

Another and more particular advice is, take care to make *your occasional prayers appropriate*. I have more than once heard a minister pray at a *funeral*, with all manner of prayer and supplication, but with no other reference to the occasion, than might be expected in a common prayer on the sabbath, when the notice of a death had been requested. Instead of this miscellaneous, unseasonable mention of every thing, remember at a funeral, that you are limited to *one* subject. With that your prayer should *begin* and *end*. I say the same thing re-

specting prayer at a marriage, an ordination, a baptism, at the communion table, and in the chamber of sickness. On every such occasion, your petitions should have respect to *one* leading subject.

As to praying with the *sick*, you will find it sometimes a delightful, but oftener a very trying duty ;—calling always for the exercise of kindness and wisdom,—and occasionally of a resolute pastoral fidelity. The points to which I refer, vary so much with the age, intelligence, rank in life, religious character, degree and kind of sickness, with its probable termination,—the bodily and mental state of the sufferer, &c.—that I cannot pretend to give advice, adapted to circumstances so diversified ; circumstances indeed, in which nothing but your own experience and judgment can be an adequate guide. When you are called to pray with a sick person, who has been both ignorant and careless concerning religion, and whose apprehensions are now awakened by present danger, let your language be so chosen as not to give a mistaken impression. Considering how liable those of whom I speak are, “to catch at every shadow of hope,”—the wisest ministers have avoided using the common appellations, “*Thy servant,—thy handmaid,*” lest the individuals concerned should ignorantly draw from it a favorable opinion of their state.

In the *family* prayers of ministers, the most common faults that I have observed, are ;—too much *length*, especially at evening ; too *little variety* of matter and expression ; or, which amounts to the same thing, too little *adaptation* to the state of a family. When you are called to perform this service, especially when abroad, for various reasons, the *youthful part of the family*, as children and servants, should not fail to be mentioned in these seasons of devotion.

## NOTE.

Though the topics treated in the foregoing Lectures on Prayer, are so many, as to render it indispensable that some of them should be passed over with great brevity; I am well aware that there are others, which might have been properly introduced, but which are altogether omitted. Among these is the duty of *praying for Rulers*. The obligation to do this, as a part of the public devotions of the sanctuary, I presume cannot be questioned by any one who has considered how reasonable is the duty in itself; how expressly and often it is enjoined in the Bible; and how universally it has been sanctioned by the usage of the church, in all ages, and among Christians of every communion. To what has been the general usage of Christendom, however, the usage of the American pulpit, for some time past, has formed, if I mistake not, an exception as lamentable as it is unaccountable. If we do not regard the affairs of our country as exempt from the control of a universal Providence;—if our public men are not already so wise as to need no guidance from the fountain of heavenly wisdom; why is it, that in our religious assemblies, the voice of supplication is so seldom heard in behalf of the men to whom our national interests are confided? If the practice of our fathers to pray for rulers, in the public assembly, as well as in the family, is passing into forgetfulness at this day, to us who are specially called to lead the devotions of our fellow Christians, the question comes home with a dread responsibility,—Why is it so? In respect to the importance of united prayer for rulers, on the part of good men, and the reasons which may have led to a neglect of this duty, my views are expressed at length in two sermons, which I published on this subject, in 1831.



**S E R M O N S.**

It seems proper to inform the reader that a leading consideration, in favor of including several *sermons* in this volume, is the desire of giving a practical illustration of the principles discussed in the fifth Lecture, on *Choice of Subjects for Sermons*. It is presumed that the student of Homiletics may better understand the views expressed in the Lecture, by having before him an original sermon, as a specimen of the kind of *subject* intended, under each head. In making this selection, however, the author has found it difficult to satisfy himself. He would have wished to insert a single rather than a double sermon, as an example of the *doctrinal* and *didactic*. In the class of *ethical*, he had chosen a sermon on *Sins of the Tongue*; but found the illegible state of the manuscript to require more attention than he can now bestow. His hope is, that, beyond the object above stated, the sermons may be found useful to his younger clerical brethren, in illustrating some of the elementary principles of preaching; and useful to other readers in illustrating the principles and spirit of the gospel.

# S E R M O N I.

## DOCTRINAL.

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### LOVE TO GOD.

MATT. 22: 37, 38. *Jesus saith unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*

THE men of rank and influence among the Jews, saw with alarm the growing regard to the instructions of Christ, manifested by the eager interest with which multitudes attended on his ministry. The plan which they adopted to arrest this current of popular sentiment, is only one example among many, in which the sagacity of wicked men confounds itself. The Pharisees first, and then the Sadducees, proposed questions to this new Teacher, which they thought so perplexing as to shake his credit with the people. The result was, however, that *they* were “put to silence,” and the multitude “were astonished” at his answers. So unexpected a discomfiture, where so easy a triumph had been anticipated, only exasperated the pride and the prejudices of these men. A third trial therefore was made by one who seems to have been eminently qualified for the purpose. He is styled a *lawyer*, denoting that he had been trained up in

the sacred literature of his country, where schools of the prophets had been maintained since the time of Samuel, and had become, especially since the captivity, the resort of young men devoted to the sacred office, as a learned profession. With much confidence probably in his own attainments, this scribe put the question, "Master which is the great commandment in the law?" The answer, which, according to Mark, made a deep and salutary impression on the enquirer, was given in the words of the text,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; &c. This is a quotation from the summary of the moral law in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy. To this Christ subjoined a summary of the second table, which is a branch of the first and great law requiring love to God; and is called the *second* because *man* is the direct, though not the primary object of regard. The clause which follows is very emphatical; “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” The plain meaning is, this is the whole of religion, as required in the Jewish scriptures. It is the essence both of the Pentateuch, (that code of statutes often called the law, the spirit of which is contained in the ten commandments;) and also of the instructions given by the prophets; and the text in its connexions shows that the moral law, especially, instead of being abrogated or counteracted, is *established* in all its honor and authority by the gospel. The text then contains the simple PROPOSITION; that LOVE TO GOD COMPRISES THE SUM OF ALL ACCEPTABLE OBEDIENCE.

The subject divides itself into two branches,

The PROPERTIES of this love, and

The DUTY OF ALL MEN TO POSSESS IT.

After considering these two points, we shall be prepared, by way of reflection, to see how any system of religion is salutary in its influence or not, just in proportion as it is conformed to this one standard of the great Teacher; and how this simple principle of the text becomes the grand principle of *Christian preaching*.—We are to consider,

#### I. The PROPERTIES of true love to God.

The terms of the text most distinctly imply, that it is a *su-*

*preme* regard to himself which God requires. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy *heart*, and with all thy *soul*, and with all thy *mind*." This reduplication of terms is designed to express, in the strongest manner, the extent of the obligation, as including all our rational and moral powers. It is so strongly expressed as to be apparently exclusive of all regard to other beings besides God, and therefore apparently inconsistent with the other express command, to love our neighbor. For how, it may be said, can there be any place for regard to ourselves or to our fellow men, if we must love God with *all* the heart? But the rule of duty is easy to be understood. If *excellence* is to be loved, *perfect* and *infinite* excellence is to be loved supremely. To give God the regard then, which his character deserves is not to exclude a proper regard to men; but to love them in subordination to Him. The love which a son owes to his father must not be transferred to a brother or sister; yet love to the father allows and requires due affection to all the members of the family. When we say, in common language, of a man ardently devoted to an object, that he pursues it *with all his heart* we mean a *comparative* not an *absolute* exclusion of all other objects. So familiar is this kind of expression, that the strongest examples of it, in which Christ requires us to *hate* father and mother, brethren and sisters, in comparison with him, are seldom if ever misunderstood by plain readers of the Bible. The love of God should so engross and fill the soul, as to exclude *contrary*, and controul *subordinate* affections. It should lead us to prize nothing in competition with him;—to pursue nothing but in subserviency to his sacred will. In short, this love implies that whatever are our possessions, enjoyments, attainments, we give him *the whole*; and serve him to the utmost extent of all our capacities.

This love is *impartial*, as well as supreme. I say impartial rather than *disinterested*, not because I perceive any good reason for the prejudice of many against the latter term, but because this prejudice exists; and because they who indulge it understand the phrase *disinterested love* to exclude all regard to

our own happiness. Doubtless some who are actuated by the worthiest motives, in attempting to vindicate the rights of God, against all interfering claims, have advanced certain extreme statements, which are liable at least to be understood as maintaining the necessary extinction of personal regard to ourselves, and our own interests, by the existence of disinterested affection in the heart. That this is not my meaning will be evident as we proceed.

But there is another extreme. Not a few moralists and Christian divines, in opposing the doctrine of disinterested affection, go all the length of maintaining that the essence of moral goodness is *self-love*. It is impossible, they affirm, for a rational being to love God, without previous evidence that he is an object of divine favor; because he must make *himself* the centre of his own affections. This sentiment the apostle is supposed to teach when he says, "We love him because he first loved us." Now there can be no question that love to God is a fruit of his Spirit, whose gracious influence begins this good work in the heart, wherever it exists; so that God's love to men is the only *efficacious cause* of their love to him. There can be no question, that the ten thousand evidences that God is good and does good, which are spread out before us in the works of providence and redemption, lay us under the strongest obligations to love him. And there can be no question that the innumerable and unmerited blessings bestowed on himself by the same divine goodness, will awaken in the Christian's bosom, a generous and fervent gratitude.

But does this make self-love the essence of moral goodness? Why then, if we are to esteem others just according to the favors they have conferred on us,—why is it wrong to *hate* enemies, according to the maxim of the Jews? Why did Christ say to them, "*Love* your enemies;—for if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye?" Publicans do the same; men who make no pretensions to religion, do this. The *felon* who deserves death, may be thankful for the perjury of a false witness, that saves him from the gallows. It is gratitude for a

breach of God's law ; and is it then gratitude such as God approves ?

Suppose, now, that before I can love God, it is necessary for me to believe that he has first loved *me* as one of his children. How am I to believe this ? Plainly, I must believe without evidence, or I must have evidence of what is untrue. For by the supposition, I *can* have no love to God, till I believe that he delights in me, as the object of his special favor, and to believe this, while I have no love to him, is to believe a falsehood.

When we speak of love as *impartial*, we ought to mean nothing inconsistent with that general law, by which every man is to act as the special guardian of his own life and happiness, and to fulfil his special obligations to his kindred, his neighbors, and his country. Not because the happiness of himself or his friends, is more *important* than that of others, but because, as a limited being, his benevolence must act on objects it can reach, within his limited sphere. That man whose benevolence is most expansive, who acts from the highest views of his relations to God and the universe, will take the best care of his own soul and body;—will be the best father, the best neighbor, the best citizen. His regard to himself will be consistent with that which he owes to all other beings. And let me ask now whether the principle that makes self-love the standard of duty is consistent with reason, with conscience, or with the Bible.

How is it consistent with *reason* ? Ought we to regard the life of a million men more than of one ?—or the life of a *man*, more than of an *insect* ? *Why* ?—Because it is more *important*. Shall a man then set up himself as his own chief object, above all the creation, and the Creator too ? An insect bears some proportion to a man ; but a man bears no proportion to God. Comparison here is out of the question, unless it be to quicken our feeble conceptions, as in the bold and beautiful figure of the prophet ; “ All nations before him are *less than nothing*.” Supreme self-love is utterly unreasonable ;—it exalts what is finite above what is infinite.

How is it consistent with *conscience* and *common sense* ? In

this one estimate of character, good men and bad instinctively agree, that he who will never sacrifice another's interest to serve his own, but will forego his own advantage to serve his fellow man, deserves approbation. *Worldly* men praise this spirit, as generous and magnanimous; and stigmatize as base and narrow, the opposite temper. In *religion* the principle holds in its full strength. What if positive proof could now be furnished that Cranmer went to the stake, from the vain glorious desire to have his name blazoned with the honors of martyrdom. What if, at this late day, documents should be discovered, showing that the philanthropist Howard, and the missionary Brainerd, with all their reputed zeal and self-denial, were at bottom actuated by motives of personal emolument or fame. I hope there is no injustice to these venerable names, in supposing such a case for illustration. Assuming the facts then to be so, I do not ask what would *Christians* say?—but what would *worldly* men say? What *do* they say concerning men of the same character now, whose motives they would discredit? Why these men after all are not *disinterested*. Who does not know with what scrutiny the little band who commenced the work of modern missions in the east, have been watched at every step; and how ready even votaries of wealth and pleasure have been to fix on any circumstance, and proclaim it aloud, from which a suspicion might be raised, that missionaries and their families are not as superior to all selfish motives, as if they were so many angels?

Illiberal and unreasonable as such invectives are, they show a common consent among men that a selfish temper is wrong. And this doctrine is no recent invention of speculating theologians. Fenelon, and Pascal, and Cicero taught it. Even the canons of criticism in Greece and Rome required that an orator or statesman should be governed, not by personal ambition, but regard to the *public* good.

But we have higher authority; and I ask briefly, how does the sentiment I am opposing accord with the *Bible*? To cut short the reply, only read my text; “Thou shalt love,”



whom?—"the Lord thy God,—with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."—Does this allow a man to make *himself* the chief object of regard?

To the two foregoing properties of the love which God requires, I intended to add two others;—That it is *diffusive* or *active*, and that it is *permanent*. The extent of the subject however allows me only to say, on the former of these, that love is the principle of all those affections and practical duties, which constitute true religion. We mean only modifications of this grand principle, when we speak of the Christian graces, repentance, faith, hope, humility, patience, meekness. The same thing holds of *relative duties*. The apostle after enumerating these, says, they are briefly comprehended in *love*. And hence the reality of our regard to God, is often suspended, as to evidence, on the simple test of *love to the brethren*; for it is plain that the same affection which delights in him, will be extended to those who bear his image; and will operate towards *all men*, like the expansive benevolence of him "who maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good."

The *permanence* of this affection is required by the same law which extends its claims not only to all the powers of a moral agent, but to every part of his existence. The duty to love God can *never cease*, even for a *moment*, because his perfections are unchangeable and eternal.

Such are the characteristics of that love which is the fulfilling of the law. I proceed,

II. TO show that it is the DUTY OF ALL MEN TO POSSESS THIS LOVE.

My *first* argument must of course be derived from the *character* of God, and the *relations* he sustains to us. His moral attributes, comprised in the general term *goodness*, are the basis of all moral obligation. This I have assumed in the remarks already made, and must assume in what is to follow. This doctrine is so necessarily presupposed in the moral affections which the law requires, that without it, these requisitions must be *nugatory*. For if God is not *lovely*, whatever powers men pos-

sess, and to whatever other things the authority of God might bind them, it could never bind them to *love* himself. To tremble at his majesty, and to dread his displeasure, might indeed be reasonable; but to *love* his character, if it were divested of all moral excellency, could never be a duty, for it would be wrong. *But God himself is love.* In him are united all those perfections which render him the object of supreme love to us. And this argument is greatly strengthened when we consider his *relations* to us.

He is our *Creator*. Besides a body “fearfully and wonderfully made,” he has given us a soul surpassing in value all his other works, and stamped with a brighter resemblance of his own intelligence and immortality. Augustine says; “If a Sculptor, after fashioning a piece of marble into a human figure, could inspire it with life and sense, could give it motion, and understanding, and speech, its first act doubtless would be to prostrate itself at the feet of its maker in subjection and thankfulness.” And shall man refuse his homage to the God that made him? The sun was formed to shine, and it shines. The beasts were made to serve man, and they bow their necks, in cheerful submission to his will. And shall man, who was formed for the special purpose of glorifying God, stand alone in this wide world, and refuse to fulfil the end of his creation?

God is our *preserver* and *benefactor*. Blessings surpassing all computation in number and value he bestows on us, while he has shaped the whole system of his beneficence so, that he is *himself* the only absolute good to the soul. The appetite of hunger is not satisfied with the fragrance of the rose,—it demands *food*. The eye is not satisfied with the enchantments of music,—its element is *light*. The ear is not satisfied with the beauties of the rainbow,—its element is *harmony*. So the love of God is the proper element of the soul. And who is in fact the happy man in this world? Not he who makes a god of this world; not he who expects happiness from any of its enjoyments, but he who lifts his eye above them all in the fervent as-

piration, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?—and there is none upon earth, that I desire besides thee."

But the consummation of all other blessings, which claim our love to God, is the gift of his Son. If we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," we are still more fearfully and wonderfully redeemed. Can any human heart fail to see, in the wonders of the cross, a demonstration of its duty to love God?

My *second* argument is drawn from the *capacities of men*, as moral agents. Let common sense be made the expositor of my text. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart." Though God is worthy of perfect love, a tree or a stone is not bound by this command. *It has no heart*;—it is not a moral agent. But should it be said, I have indeed understanding, affections, and will; I can love an object that is present to my senses, and that is agreeable to my feelings; but for a sinful and limited being like me to love an infinite spirit,—to love a *holy God, perfectly*, is as much impossible as if I had *no* heart; again I say, let common sense and conscience speak. You love your *friend* after he is laid in the grave. Was it then a portion of organized dust, or an intelligent, immortal *mind*, that was thus dear to your heart? And if you can love the *spirit* of your friend,—that part of him which loved you,—why not love the *Father* of spirits? And what if God is an infinite, and you are a limited being? He requires you to love him, not with an *infinite* love, not with the love of Gabriel, but according to the measure of *your* capacities, or with all *your* heart. And what if that heart is sinful? Does this exempt it from obligation to be holy? When you say I cannot love God with this sinful heart, you offer as an excuse the very thing which constitutes your guilt: an excuse which is never offered in any other human concern. Should a disobedient son say of a good father, "I cannot love him; I should rejoice to obey his commands, but can find no satisfaction in it," who would give the weight of a feather to such an apology? Can you then say, and think yourself sincere and innocent in saying, "I desire with all my heart to love God, but yet my heart refuses to love him?"

What is this but absurdity and mockery! Are you a moral agent? Then conscience decides that you have no want of capacities to obey the first and great commandment of the law.

My *third* argument arises from the consideration that *if men are not bound to love God supremely, there can be no such thing as holiness or sin in the universe.*

Suppose we say with Bolingbroke, that our chief principle of action should be regard to our own interest;—or with Rousseau resolve all into *feeling*, and say, “that what we *feel* to be right is right, and what we *feel* to be wrong is wrong. All the morality of our actions lies in the judgment we ourselves form of them.” But if the rule of duty changes with the interests and feelings of men,—there is *no* rule. What is right in a man to-day, may be wrong to-morrow. Or what is right in one man may be wrong in another. One’s interest and feelings may prompt him to pray,—another’s to blaspheme. Both conform to the rule of duty;—and the same action may be both right and wrong at the same moment.

Now, to make the essence of duty to God consist in any modification of self-love, is to deny all distinction of character between the good and the bad. We may suppose an individual, who is an example of consummate depravity, making it his highest object of regard to promote his own interest. His views as to what constitutes his own best interest may, indeed, be utterly wrong; but still he makes himself the centre of his own supreme affection. If we say that an angel must necessarily be actuated by the same principle, *namely, a governing regard to himself*, we maintain that there is no essential difference, as to the elements of moral character, between an angel and a devil. We must then admit our obligations to love God supremely, or set aside the basis of all moral government.

My *fourth* and last argument is drawn from the *tendency* of obedience to this command. To make every moral agent his own centre,—and to suppose it lawful for him to desire the welfare of others, only in subordination to his own, is to place

him in perpetual conflict with each fellow being around him, and to fill the moral system with everlasting discord and war.

Not so with the system that makes God supreme, the centre and the object, to whom all eyes are to look, and in whom all hearts are to unite. Here you see an authority that goes to the main-spring of action in every heart, and claims controul over every thought and feeling. Here you see a principle of all-pervading efficacy, adapted to reach every part of Jehovah's empire, and to bind the hearts of all moral agents to each other, and to the throne of God, with the same bond of holy affection. This principle in the moral world is like the influence of the sun in the material, which holds the inferior orbs in harmonious movement, around the common centre of attraction. The time does not allow us to dwell on this delightful topic ; but the day is coming when the universal prevalence of true religion will illustrate its happy tendency to produce "peace on earth, and good will to men," as well as "glory to God in the highest." The golden age of poetry is fiction and fable ;—but the love of God, when it becomes, as it will become, the predominant principle of action among men, will diffuse over this dreary world, the bloom and beauty of Paradise. The asp and the adder will be harmless companions to the little child ; "the lion will eat straw like the ox, and the leopard lie down with the kid." Then, "Truth will spring out of the earth, and righteousness look down from heaven ; the wilderness will become as Eden, and the desert as the garden of the Lord ; joy and gladness will be heard therein,—thanksgiving and the voice of melody."

# S E R M O N I I .

## DOCTRINO-PRACTICAL.

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### LOVE TO GOD.

It remains now that we consider some of the doctrinal and practical *results* arising from the view of the subject, given in the preceding discourse.

I. If it is the duty of men to love God with all the heart, *the gospel was not designed, as some have supposed, to supersede the obligations of the divine law.*

The religion of the Bible, as a system, is complete, and consistent with itself in all its parts. But the system which many embrace and profess to derive from the Bible, is of a very different character. There are some who seem to make entire conformity to the law essential, not only in point of *duty*, but also of *sincerity* and *acceptance*. They admit the hope of divine favor to nothing short of sinless perfection; and so interpret the law as to make it set aside the gospel.

But there is another extreme, which, under different names, is much more common, and much more dangerous in tendency, because it coincides with the strongest propensities of the unsanctified heart. I refer to those opinions which make the gos-

pel supersede the law. Since salvation is not to be obtained by personal obedience, some have boldly maintained that the law is no longer of any use ; that believers are under no obligation to conform to it ; and that, of course, nothing which they do is offensive to God. These opinions, in their most open and explicit forms, are so plainly contrary to the word of God, that they are much less prevalent than others of kindred tendency but more plausible aspect. There are not a few who would not go all this length, but still regard the old law requiring "love to God with all the heart" as really unsuited to the condition of *fallen* man, and as necessarily superseded by the gospel, which they view as a mitigated law, demanding only *sincere* though *imperfect* obedience. But it is to my purpose to show that any sentiment, which contravenes the great commandment requiring supreme love to God, is as inconsistent with the gospel, as with the law, and sweeps away in fact the whole system of revealed religion. Let us consider the case, and see if it could be the design of the gospel to repeal or modify the law.

Look at the *foundations* of this law, and the *purpose* for which it was established. Some things are in themselves so indifferent, that the same authority might either require or forbid them. The ritual precepts as to *leaven* and *honey* are of this sort. But the supposition that God *could* forbid men to love himself, is absurd. Should he *tolerate* hatred to himself, or to each other, among moral agents, his kingdom would be divided against itself, and the chief ends of moral government would be subverted. To supersede his law, therefore, or to relax the strictness and extent of its claims, would be inconsistent with his own *perfections*, and with the best interests of the universe.

Look at the *doctrines* and *precepts* of Christ. "Think not," said he, "that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. Till heaven and earth pass, not one jot or tittle (not the minutest letter or point) of the law shall fail." I am aware that some suppose this to respect not the moral law, but the Mosaic code, and the prophets generally. These doubtless it *did* respect. But *whatever else*

the great Teacher meant, he plainly meant the moral law *chiefly*. Hence he went on to comment on the perversion of this law by the Scribes. "Thou shalt not kill;"—they understood to forbid the *act* of murder; he extended it also to *malice* in the heart. The *act* of *adultery*, they condemned;—he represented this as also a sin of the *heart*. *Hatred to friends*, they considered to be wrong; he also forbade *hatred to enemies*." This strain of commentary and reprehension he closed by saying—"Be ye *perfect*, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Does this look like lowering down the standard of duty? Not an instance can be found in the New Testament, where any license is given to one sinful word or thought. Does this look like a design in Christ to make the gospel a *mitigated* law? Besides, no stronger testimony to the perfection and perpetuity of the law could be given, than is implied in the fact, that John, and Christ, and the Apostles incessantly preached "that men should *repent*." But why repent? Because they are *transgressors*; not of an abrogated or mitigated law, but of one that is unchangeably holy, just and good.

Look at the *threatenings* of Christ. In the most dreadful curses of the law, what is there more appalling and dreadful, than in the sanctions of the gospel itself?—"these shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Look at the *sufferings* of Christ. For what purpose did he endure the agonies of the cross? Simply that he might "magnify the law, and make it honorable;"—and yet provide for the pardon of its transgressors. Well therefore might Paul say, with this very subject in his eye, "Do we then make void the law through faith?" Does the doctrine of salvation by grace set aside the standard of moral obligation? "God forbid;—yea, we *establish* the law." And so it is. In the scene of Calvary, God speaks out his unalterable purpose to maintain his law, in language even more awful than the thunderings of Sinai.

Look at the *example* of Christ. In what instance did he transgress the law? "Go to natural religion," says an eloquent preacher, "lay before her *Mahomet* and his apostles, arrayed in



armour and in blood ; show her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed.\* ‘ Then carry her into his retirement ; show her the prophet’s chamber, his concubines and his wives ; and let her hear him allege a divine commission to justify his licentiousness, and his crimes. When she is tired with this prospect, show her the blessed *Jesus*, humble and meek, and doing good to all men. Let her see *his* retirement ; let her follow him to the Mount, and hear his devotions, and listen to his heavenly discourse. Let her view his whole life ; let her stand by his cross, and hear him in the agony of death, pray for his enemies ;—and then ask, *which is the Prophet of God?*’

Truly, brethren, he who “ *did no sin,*” —who himself never broke the divine law in one tittle, could not intend to give a *mitigated* law to his followers.

In a word, make the appeal to any *sincere disciple of Christ*, who has felt the power of the gospel on his heart, whether he is, or wishes to be exempt from obligation to keep the whole law ? Which of the commandments is he at liberty to break ? —Not one.—For every sin that he commits he is guilty,—he *feels* guilty ; and conscience ratifies, in all its extent and strictness, the law that requires him to love God supremely, and to be “ holy as God is holy.”

2. If it is the duty of men to love God with all the heart, *there is no way of salvation for a sinner but by sovereign grace.* Had he obeyed the law perfectly, he would have been justified by works. But he has broken it.

Here then he stands as a perishing sinner. All that he has come short of perfect love is *sin*, and needs forgiveness. He has come short entirely ;—all his moral affections have been wrong. He has no obedience to plead, and if he had any, it could avail nothing towards his justification as a sinner. He can

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\* The reader is informed that whenever I employ the double comma, it denotes a *proper quotation* ; the single inverted comma, at the beginning of a passage, signifies that the *sentiment* is from another but not exactly in his *language*.

look nowhere for relief but to Christ, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."

3. If it is the duty of men to love God with all the heart, *the directions which should be given to sinners, by the Christian preacher, are simple, and intelligible, and reasonable.*

I must be permitted to dwell on this point, as specially important to those of my hearers, who are devoted to the sacred office. No fact is more evident than that very different effects are produced by the labors of different ministers. The sermons of one are attended with deep and vivid impressions of truth on the conscience; and many from time to time, are savingly converted to God.

Another man, not inferior to him in talents, and equally anxious for the salvation of his hearers, preaches perhaps for years, what seems to be very much the same system of religion, but no visible and powerful influence attends his ministrations. Whence comes this difference? Aside from the cooperation of the Spirit, which is necessary to success in any instance, and which is given or withheld in a sovereign manner;—aside too from many *circumstances*, which might be supposed to have a bearing on the case, the chief difference I presume will be found to lie in one *elementary principle* of preaching, and that is, the different method by which the two men aim to *reach the conscience* of hearers. One makes the doctrine of moral obligation, as summarily expressed in my text, stand out, in all its prominence to the view of each individual sinner, as applying to *himself*;—the other does not. And a mistake here is fundamental in its practical influence. It gives a character of inefficacy to a man's whole ministrations, which no goodness of motive, no warmth of zeal in the pulpit, can retrieve. The traveller who has taken a wrong path, may pursue his journey with confidence and despatch; but the rapidity of his movement does not bring him any nearer to the end at which he aims. The faster he travels,

the farther he wanders from the right way, and the more difficult it becomes to correct the mistake. Just so in the case before us. The preacher who starts with wrong premises as to the strictness and extent of the divine law, may be warm in address to the feelings of men ; but their feeling will not be such as the gospel was intended to produce.

Let us resume the two cases just now supposed. A preacher represents the divine law as originally requiring supreme love to God, but as *modified* now to suit the present condition of the world. What then is the *character of men*, under this modified law ? *Sinners* doubtless they are, in some general sense ; they do not love God with all the heart, perhaps do not love him at all ; but to say that they have a carnal mind, which is *enmity* to him, would be to treat them with unreasonable severity. And what is the *gospel* ? A scheme of infinite benevolence, which regards men as *wretched*, rather than *guilty*. A scheme which represents Christ as interposing to ransom men from a misery which they do not strictly *deserve*, but which they cannot escape without such an interposition. It is an expedient in which a compassionate Saviour takes the part of poor, helpless sinners against the awful attribute of divine justice. And what is *repentance* ? Such a sorrow as a poor, helpless man can exercise, that he is in a deplorable state of alienation from God, in which he is not only unable to make an atonement for himself, but to accept the atonement God has provided. And what if he does *not* repent ? Shall he be told that he must perish ? Rather he is told that he must use *means, wait upon God, and do the best that he can*. And if he pleads that he *cannot* repent, still he is told that God is merciful, and will never cast off those who do the *best that they can*.

In this way a minister sometimes builds up a system of half-way religion, by exhorting men to read, and hear, and pray, in a manner confessedly destitute of all true regard to the glory of God, and implying that it would be unjust in him not to accept such sincere endeavors to repent as they exhibit, though they still remain impenitent. When he has trained up his hearers in

this way, they demand that he shall preach only on some general topic of religion ; and are best of all pleased, when that topic is the *compassion of Christ*. And if they happen to hear a sermon on the justice, or the sovereignty of God, or on the endless misery of the wicked, they *cry out* upon it, as divesting the Father of mercies of all his lovely attributes, and making him a great tyrant, from whose wrath there is no escape, because he is strong enough, and cruel enough, to crush men into an undeserved destruction.

But who has *authorised* any man to instruct an assembly of dying sinners in this manner ? Who authorised *him* to make terms of duty and salvation, such as are unknown to the Bible ;—and such as every one of his hearers may comply with, in every respect, and yet be eternally shut out of heaven ?

Now let us turn for a moment to the influence of that man's labors, who treats these subjects in an opposite manner. He takes the law as it came from God, in all its strictness and spirituality. He tells his hearers,—the demand of this law is, that you “love God with all the heart.” The demand is just, because he is worthy of your love ; because he has given you all the capacities necessary to complete obedience ; and because as a perfect moral governor, he never can release you from this obligation. But you have broken his law. And now God comes to you with proposals of mercy through the sacrifice of his Son. He offers you *pardon*, on condition that you condemn yourselves as transgressors, and cast yourselves at his feet, through Christ, by repentance and faith. To these terms you ought to submit. To these terms you must submit or you are undone. This is language which men can understand. It proposes no compromise derogatory to God ; it affords no refuge to a self-justifying temper ; it tears away the veil of delusion, which many spread between their own eyes and their own sins ; it shows them that all their inability to obey the law or the gospel lies in the desperate wickedness of their own hearts ; and that the only way in which a guilty and perishing sinner can hope to escape eter-

nal death, is not by contending with the law, not by denying his own guilt, but by flying to the blood of Christ.

Now, is any one at a loss which of these methods is best adapted to produce, and which does produce the proper effects of preaching? Look over the congregations of this land.—Where are revivals of religion most common? Where do you see the Redeemer “travelling in the greatness of his strength mighty to save,” and trembling sinners bowing before his cross? Not where the standard of duty is lowered down to men’s hearts; but where the obligation of the law, where the guilt and the danger of sinners are most clearly and powerfully urged on the conscience. This is the way to wake men up from the slumber of death, and to make them feel their need of the gospel.

4. If it is the duty of men to love God with all the heart,—what is called *practical religion*, as the phrase is often used in the pulpit, and elsewhere, is essentially defective. The great difficulty is, it has no *standard*. No term in our language is used more loosely than that which designates what the world call *morality*; and that because the thing itself is altogether indefinite. ‘It is partial and mutable, changing with the parallel of latitude, and with a thousand varying circumstances. It is one thing in the Indies, another in Tartary or Egypt. It alters with other fashions of the century. It depends on climate, on forms of government, on accident; it varies when you have climbed a mountain, or passed to the other side of a river. The morality of the Mahometan permits him to *persecute*, but not to *drink wine*; that of the Hindoo to *drink wine*, but not to *taste meat*. The morality of a Jew allowed him to *hate a gentile*; that of a Roman to fight for conquest; that of a Carthaginian allowed him to *lie*; that of a Spartan, to *steal*.’ The morality of two, among the greatest moralists of antiquity, allowed them to *kill themselves*; and many a modern son of Moloch, who would shudder at self-murder, and would think himself a monster to kill his infant, or his aged father, as pagans do; yet scruples not to kill his *friend, in single combat*.

Worldly moralists, I say, have *no standard*. The rule of

one is, *conformity to custom*. He never suspects that he is doing wrong, while he does only what is *commonly* done.

With another, it is *expediency*. He keeps the sabbath, if it is *convenient*; he speaks the truth, if it is *convenient*; he *prays*, perhaps, if it is *convenient*. Cromwell was a devotee occasionally, and prayed prostrate on the ground. But it was a maxim with him, that “the law of God, though commonly binding, may be dispensed with on special occasions, and that private justice and morality must yield to public necessity.”

With a third, morality consists in *social duties*. The man forgets God, lives without prayer, disregards or disbelieves the Bible, but glories in being a *moral man*, because he is just and kind to those around him.

Shall I tell you then who *is* a moral man in the sight of God? It is he that bows to the divine *law*, as the supreme rule of right; he that is influenced by a *governing regard to God*, in all his actions; he that obeys other commands spontaneously because he has obeyed the first and great command, “give me thy heart.” His conduct is not conformed to custom, or expediency, but to one consistent, immutable standard of duty. Take this man into a court of justice, and call on him to testify, and he will not bear *false witness*. Give him the charge of untold treasures,—he will not *steal*. Trust him with the dearest interests of yourself or family,—you are safe; because he has a living principle of truth and integrity in his bosom. He is as worthy of confidence in the *dark*, as at *noon-day*; for he is a moral man, not because reputation or interest demands it, not because the eye of public observation is fixed upon him, but because the love and fear of God have predominant ascendancy in his heart.

Now we might well expect that they who make no serious account of religion, should be without any fixed standard of character. But it is both strange and lamentable, that such should be the fact with those who believe the Bible, and those who are professed expositors of the Bible. And yet who does not know how common a thing it is for ministers, who would by no

means join with infidel moralists, to shut God out of his own world, still to discharge their official duties in such a manner, as to *let down* the tone of doctrine, and the tone of practical piety, and the tone of Christian discipline, because they think this an easier way than to go *straight on*, and aim at maintaining the unbending standard of the Bible. And who does not know how utterly fruitless the efforts of such ministers often prove to make their hearers even moral.\*

But, my brethren, while it is important that we know how the gospel should be *preached* to men, there is a question of deeper and more momentous interest to ourselves, whether *we* have individually felt the power of this religion on our *own hearts*? To you who expect to become ministers of Christ, let me say,—though you understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though you could pray and preach like angels, without love to God, you are *nothing*. But with this heavenly temper as your governing principle of action, you will find the

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\* One of the most powerful preachers of this age tried this experiment for twelve years, and afterwards made the following emphatic declarations: ‘I could expatiate on the meanness of dishonesty, on the villany of falsehood, on the despicable arts of calumny,—on all those deformities of character which awaken indignation against the pests and disturbers of human society. Now could I upon the strength of these expostulations, have got the thief to give up his stealing, and the liar his deviations from truth,—it never occurred to me that all this might have been done, and yet the soul of every hearer have remained in full alienation from God,—as destitute of the essence of religious principle as ever. But the interesting fact is, that during the whole of that period, in which I made no attempt against the enmity of the carnal mind to God, I certainly did press the reformations of honour, and truth, and integrity among my people, but I never once heard of any such reformations being effected. I am not sensible that all the vehemence with which I urged the virtues and proprieties of social life, had the weight of a feather on the moral habits of my parishioners.’\* Such was the experience of this eminent preacher. And it was not till he gathered from the humble cottages of his flock, new views of religion; it was not till he became impressed with the strictness of the law, and the utter alienation of the heart from God; it was not till he urged upon his hearers, as perishing sinners, the doctrines of the cross, that he saw any salutary change in their morals.

\* Chalmers’s address to Kilmany.

ministry a blessed work. Brainerd, among his Indians, with his bark cottage, and his couch of straw, was an enviable man, compared to any graceless occupant of a throne, with all his palaces, and purple, and gold. Take care, then, young ambassadors of Christ, that your hearts be truly devoted to God, and no matter to what self-denial you are called; no matter where your field of labor lies, or where your dust is deposited at last:—you have a father and a home above, where you will meet as brethren, to go no more out forever.

Other important points might properly be mentioned, as results of this subject,—but I pass them all over except one, with which I close.

The same unchangeable law that is now the standard of our *duty*, will be the standard of our *trial* for an eternal retribution. The heavens will pass away; the elements melt with fervent heat;—the earth also, and the works that are therein will be burnt up. But God will remain the same; his law will remain the same; and the subjects of his government will remain under the same everlasting obligations to be holy as he is holy. And when the Lord Jesus shall “come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels,” all nations will be gathered before him. You, my dear hearers, will witness that scene, and make a part of that assembly. Then you will hear that great statute of the moral world, which was published at Sinai, and republished by Christ, proclaimed again, with still more dread solemnity from the judgment seat,—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart.” Then the Judge will say to impenitent sinners; “It was to magnify this law and make it honorable, that I shed my blood. It was to redeem you from its penalty that I hung on the cross. But you refused to be redeemed;—you spurned the offers of my grace; and now the honor of the law must be maintained in your sufferings, and its ‘penalty, without abatement or mitigation must fall on yourselves.” Say, what can you plead? You have no righteousness of your own; no interest in the righteousness of Christ. There you stand, speechless. Conscience says the sentence is just. There *was* a day



of salvation, but it is past. There *was* a sceptre of mercy, which you were invited to touch and live,—but it is become a flaming sword, lifted to cut you asunder. There *was* a voice that said, “look unto me and be saved;” but it has become a voice of inexorable justice, to pronounce your doom.

My dear hearers, men may speculate now, on these awful subjects. They may doubt and dispute how much meaning there is in the precepts of the law,—and how much meaning in its penalty; but heaven and earth will *know* what it means, when they hear the sentence on transgressors,—“Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” Fly, then, from that awful sentence, ye prisoners of hope. In the name of your Lawgiver and your Judge, I entreat you now,—“*prepare to meet your God.*”

# SERMON III.

## ETHICAL.

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### FORESIGHT OF FUTURITY.

*JER. 8: 7. Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.*

This is one of the many examples in which the sagacity of irrational animals is made to reprove the insensibility of men. The stork is said to be a pattern of filial affection, in the fidelity with which it feeds and defends its parent bird, even unto death. That her nest may be elevated above the reach of danger from the hand of man, she makes "the fir trees her house." At the approach of winter she escapes to a southern climate, and returns with the approach of summer. The same instinct governs the turtle, the crane, and the swallow, who "observe the time of their coming." The return of these birds of passage from their winter migration, is thus alluded to in the Song of Solomon, describing the charming scenery of spring in Palestine.

“Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”

The purpose for which the illustration of the text was introduced by the prophet is briefly this. The Jewish people had become bold in sin. Even their religious teachers contributed to the general depravity, by crying peace, peace, to these transgressors, till they were not at all ashamed of their abominations. The time was near at hand when God had threatened that he would give them “gall to drink,” for their iniquities. Jeremiah told them, that the Chaldeans were coming to invade the land, and devour all that was in it. Yet they rushed on, with an utter heedlessness of consequences; a heedlessness that was rebuked and shamed by the prudent foresight of the stork, the turtle, and the swallow, in flying from the storms of winter.

The text thus explained, suggests as the subject of this discourse, a general principle, of great practical importance,—namely;

**THAT THE PRESENT CONDUCT OF MEN SHOULD BE REGULATED BY A WISE FORESIGHT OF FUTURITY.**

The illustration of this principle may be pursued under three enquiries;—**TO WHAT EXTENT,**—by **WHAT MEANS,**—and for **WHAT REASONS,** should we thus anticipate futurity?

**FIRST,** to **WHAT EXTENT** *may we foresee events that are yet future?*

In some respects doubtless the power of doing this is very limited. That comprehensive, intuitive foresight, which is implied in the divine omniscience, is very different from any thing which belongs to minds that are of yesterday and know comparatively nothing. So complex is the system of things in this world, so variously are remote consequences affected by the operation of a thousand causes, hidden from human view, that in many respects, *futurity* is a word of nearly the same meaning as *uncertainty*. On this ground stands the argument for a divine revelation, which is drawn from prophecy; because the infallible prediction of what is future belongs only to him who

“knows the end from the beginning.” When we speak of human foresight, therefore, we do not mean omniscience; we do not mean intuition. We mean only that regard to futurity which is founded on evidence, and which becomes rational beings. This, of course, must be different in degree, according to circumstances. In some cases, the *possibility* of an occurrence hereafter, ought to have much the same influence on us as its *certainty*. For example, the infidel disbelieves a state of eternal retribution for the wicked; he calls on the Christian to demonstrate its certainty; but he cannot pretend to *know* that there is *not* such a state. He cannot demonstrate that hell is an impossibility. As a prudent man then, on his own principles, he ought to act as though he knew it were a reality. For as Locke most emphatically says, “If the worst that can happen to the believer if he mistake, be the best that can happen to the unbeliever, if he be right, who without madness can run the venture? Who in his senses would choose to come within the possibility of infinite misery?”

But besides considerations like these, there is a proper regard to futurity resting on evidence, which sometimes amounts to *probability*, and sometimes to *certainty*. For example; that each individual of this assembly will die, is *certain*; that most of us shall die by some sort of disease, is *probable*; but by *what* disease, *when*, *where*, in what *circumstances* as to our bodily or mental state, or our relation to survivors, is wholly unknown. That all of us shall die is *certain*; that one or more of our number will die *this year*, is *probable*; that most of us shall die within fifty years, is *more* probable; that all of us shall die within one hundred years, is still *more* probable; and that none of us shall live for twice that period, is quite *certain*.—Again; that any individual of this assembly, who shall perseveringly reject the gospel, will perish forever, is *certain*; that some of us may be of the unhappy number, who will thus perish, is *probable*. But how many, and who, of all that sit in these seats to-day, will remain impenitent, and go away from the presence of God,

into everlasting punishment, God knows, but it is impossible for *us* to foresee.

In respect to the arrangements of Providence that will regulate the affairs of our lives hereafter, we are, for the most part, in equal uncertainty. As to health and sickness ; place of abode ; relative duties, trials and enjoyments ; and as to the means and measure of our usefulness, the extent of our foresight seldom reaches beyond probability, and often amounts to nothing. God in his wisdom saw it not best that any man should have the means of anticipating exactly what will happen to him, from day to day. Such a disclosure of futurity would go far to frustrate the exhilarating and sustaining influence of *hope* ; and to destroy a thousand motives to energy in action, which derive all their power from *uncertainty*.

But futurity is not wholly concealed behind a veil. Certain things must be foreknown, as essential to a state of probation, and as involved in the daily hopes and duties of Christians. Such is the perpetuity of our own existence ; the safety and ultimate triumph of the church ; the eternal consequences connected with a holy or sinful character, formed in this world. Besides such things as these, there are others, which we must view as so certain, or at least so probable, that our conduct should be regulated by a wise regard to consequences.

We proceed then to enquire,

SECONDLY,—*By WHAT MEANS are we thus to foresee the events of futurity.*

Nothing supernatural is to be supposed in this case. Paganism has resorted to its systems of necromancy, to rend away the veil which hides a dark and dreaded hereafter, because a guilty conscience sees or fancies some hand-writing on the wall, or shudders at some death-watch, or some dream that calls for an interpreter. And doubtless we are not aware how much paganism and atheism too, God sees in Christian lands, disguised under the various forms of regard to omens, and lucky days, and appeals to chance, all of which are a virtual denial of his providential government. But the means of foresight which I am

now to mention are only such as God has ordained. These are two, *experience* and *revelation*.

To judge from experience what is probable or certain hereafter, is the province of *reason*. The ground of judgment in this case, lies in that uniform course of events, from which we conclude that the future will resemble the past. In what are called the laws of nature, we calculate on a stated connexion of causes and effects. On this principle we know that water will flow downwards from the summits of mountains, and not in the contrary direction ;—that animal bodies are sustained by food, and destroyed by fire or poison. We know that the light to-day will be followed by the darkness of night, and that the night will be followed by another day. On this regularity depend all human plans of business. Who could navigate the ocean, if there were no regularity in polar attraction, or in the movements of the sun ? Who could till the earth, if there were no uniformity in the seasons ? Who could travel a journey, if he could have no foresight as to the length of the day ? Who could provide for his family, if it were wholly uncertain whether the winter would last one week, or one year ?

In the laws of *mind* too, there is a uniformity similar to that which exists in the material world. Understanding, heart, conscience, and passions, are attributes of every human mind, which are affected essentially in the same manner by the same causes. If it were not so, civil government and social relations must cease. No laws could be framed for any community or any family. No reliance could be placed on any system of instruction, or argument, or persuasion. For who would undertake to instruct or move his fellow men, if there were no tendency in argument to convince, or in motive to excite ? Amidst the great diversities of intellect and temper among men, there are points of resemblance, that are nearly universal ; and from these, a careful observer may often predict the conduct of voluntary agents, with as much certainty as the astronomer calculates an eclipse. It was no accident that the sagacious **Burke** foresaw so exactly, the results of the French revolution.

Now the lessons of experience are not useful merely to the philosopher, and the reader of history. They are intelligible to common men, and on common subjects. They constitute a code of laws which every prudent man carries with him, and instinctively applies in his daily conduct.

On this principle of foresight from experience, the best systems of education are founded. The influence of youthful habits, in forming the whole character, leads us to estimate the prospects of manhood from the promise of early life. In the same way we predict the salutary or baneful influence of parental example on the young, as that influence is good or bad. We predict that one man will become the victim of intemperance,—that another will be poor, and another rich, from the usual connexion of causes and effects as we see them in experience.

On this principle we all act in common affairs. We would not scruple to take a nauseous drug to avoid a fever ;—nor to part with a mortified limb to save life ;—nor to lighten a sinking ship, for our own preservation, by throwing our goods into the sea. Should a man come to you with a dose of arsenic, as a healthful medicine, and say, the world have always been mistaken in thinking it a mortal poison ;—swallow it, and you shall receive no harm. Would you listen to him ? No,—you would look on him as an insane man or a murderer ; you would listen to *experience*, which says—swallow it, and you will not live one day.

The other means of foresight to which I alluded is *revelation*. This is the province of *faith*. “ Noah built an ark, to the saving of his house.” Why ? He foresaw that a *flood* was coming. *How* did he foresee this ? “ Being warned of God.” The men of that generation too, had the same *means* of knowing that a deluge would come,—the warning of God. They were told this for one hundred and twenty years, by Noah. But they had no faith, and therefore no foresight of the event, “ till the flood *came*, and took them all away.”

God warned Pharaoh ; “ Tomorrow, about this time, I will

cause a very grievous *hail*, such as hath not been in Egypt since the foundation thereof; every man and beast, that shall be found in the field, shall die. He that feared the word of the Lord, made his servants and cattle flee into the houses; and he that regarded not the word of the Lord, left his servants and cattle in the field." At the appointed time the hail came, and smote all that were in the field, man and beast. These men that perished in the field might have found a shelter, as well as others; they had the same seasonable warning with others. Why did they *not foresee* the coming destruction?—They had no fear of the Lord,—no *faith* that his threatening would be executed.

When the approaching overthrow of Sodom was announced to Lot, he fled to Zoar. Why did not his sons in law escape also? Surely they might have foreseen what was coming; they were warned of God, "Get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." To mention no more examples of this sort, there are many future things which reason and experience could teach, either not at all, or very imperfectly, which faith foresees by a confident reliance on the declarations of God. Thus Abraham "foresaw Christ's day, and rejoiced." Thus "David in spirit called him Lord, when he saw his glory and spake of him." Thus Isaiah foresaw the cross erected, and the suffering Saviour expiring on it. With the same certainty, though not inspired, the believer now may know beforehand, that whatever God has spoken will be accomplished. Has God said "He that believeth shall be saved?"—it must be so. Has God said, "He that believeth not shall be damned? These shall go away, into everlasting punishment?"—it must be so: reason may speculate,—unbelief may doubt and dispute; but faith listens with reverence to God, and foresees the unquenchable fire prepared for the wicked, and the "smoke of their torment ascending up forever and ever."

Thus it is that reason *foresees* future things, as probable or certain, in the light of experience. And thus it is that faith, with a clearer vision, foresees, in the light of revelation, many things which are rendered certain by the character or declarations



of God. In this way the believer has a general assurance that the Judge of all the earth will do right. He has a more particular assurance that “The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church;”—that “all things will work together for good to them that love God;” that all who embrace the gospel will be happy, and all who reject it will perish. He foresees the solemnities of his own dying hour. He foresees that glorious, dreadful day, when the “Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father, with the holy angels;—will gather all nations before him, and sever the wicked from among the just;—when the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and pass away with a great noise;—the elements shall melt with fervent heat;—the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.” Nevertheless, the believer, according to promise, “looks for new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” The apostle Peter, having surveyed these awful scenes of futurity, speaks of scoffers who make a jest of them all, “saying, where is the promise of his coming?” But very different, he says, should be the feelings of Christians; “seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be, in all holy conversation and godliness; looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” But if God has thus given us the *means*, in his providence and word, of acting with a wise foresight of futurity; let us proceed to inquire,

THIRDLY, *For WHAT REASONS should we act in this manner?*

I. *It is a sufficient reason for doing so, that this is only exercising a PROPER CONFIDENCE IN GOD.* When he told the wicked Jews that, if they did not repent, the Chaldean sword should desolate their nation, as I have said already, they might have *foreseen* the approaching ruin. To go on heedlessly, till the calamity came, was a thousand times more unreasonable than the conduct of the *stork*, that had *no* reason, but saw the

signs of the heavens, and fled away from the approaching tempests. And still more unreasonable is the conduct of immortal beings, who live as though there were no promises nor threatenings, no disclosures of an eternal hereafter, in the Bible.

Besides, the regard to futurity which God requires of us, is only a proper respect to his *providence*. There is a common extreme on this subject, consisting in an anxious, apprehensive state of mind about things that belong only to God, or things of which he has made no disclosure to us. It is a want of confidence that God will do what is best. For example; good men sometimes indulge excessive anxiety for the safety of the church. They speak of its dangers, in a strain of unbelief, as though the cause of truth were about to be utterly overthrown. They are in much the same state of mind with a man on shipboard, for the first time;—a stranger to navigation, he is afraid that the pilot will commit some mistake; he is alarmed at every change of the wind, and every movement of the ship,—expecting that *something will happen*, he knows not what. But God has not committed the care of the church to us;—wo to its interests if he had. He has not made us responsible for the safety of the church. That is in good hands. “Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. Blessed, O Lord of hosts, is the man that trusteth in thee.”

In respect to *individual* interests too, there is often an anxious looking forward, which arises from distrust of providence. God has disclosed to us so much of futurity as enables us to do *our duty*. Here we must rest. All anxiety as to his secret purposes concerning ourselves, which have no respect to our *duty*; all restless desire to read the *whole book* of providence, when he is pleased to show us only a *single page*, is a meddling with divine prerogatives, as sinful as it is unwise.

But there is an *opposite* extreme. It is a *blind trust* in providence; a kind of Christian fatalism. It folds its hands and looks upward, with a presumptuous assurance that God will not

only govern the world, but will also do what belongs to men. This we have no right to expect. If you know your house to be on fire, and sit still, because your safety depends on providence, according to the settled law of that providence, you will be consumed. That providence accomplishes ends, only by *means*.

Now, between this restless anxiety, on the one hand, and this presumptuous confidence, on the other, a wise regard to futurity resigns the throne and the sceptre to God, and leaves to man, with all his powers and motives and means of knowledge, only one grand concern, and that is *to do his present duty*. Hence,

*A second reason why we should act with a wise foresight of futurity is, IT WILL PROMOTE OUR USEFULNESS.* He that acts without plan, or whose plan contravenes the settled arrangements of providence, will act to no good purpose. Does the merchant wish to make a successful voyage? he studies the market, and freights his ship, and plans her destination, with a careful regard to circumstances and probable results. Would the mariner reach his port? he looks at his compass, watches the aspects of the heavens, changes his helm and sails, with the changing winds and currents. So it should be in all human pursuits. Will that student become a man of knowledge, and a useful man, who has no plan of study? Who dreams away one half of his time in doing nothing, and spends the other half at random, in reading books of no value?—and that have no tendency to qualify him for serving God, and his generation? *Birds* know better than this. *Insects* know better than this. “Go to the *ant*, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise; which having neither guide, overseer, nor ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”

But to secure usefulness, it is not enough that we act from *plan*; it must be plan such as God approves. Most men live to little purpose, because they “look at things seen and temporal, and forget things unseen and eternal.” They act from *present* impulse, and for the *present* moment.

Had the Puritans of the seventeenth century been common men, how easily might they have escaped the fetters, and dungeons, and various forms of martyrdom, which they endured? It was only to do what thousands of others did; it was only to make conscience bend to authority and custom. They might in one moment have professed to believe, what they did not believe, and promised to do what God had forbidden; and then they might have been quiet in their own houses, and many of them might have been earls, and dukes, and dignitaries in church and state. But these holy men acted from higher principles. These daring spirits, trained in the fires of persecution, were not afraid of death. Cesar, at the summit of his power, with all his victorious legions, could not have subdued their more than Roman heroism. He might have hewed them limb from limb; but every one of them would have died a conqueror. Had those men bowed before the storm that beat upon them, what would the world have been in the nineteenth century? Shrouded in moral and political darkness. So far as we can judge, the preeminent advantages of this age, are owing, under God, chiefly to the spirit of the Puritans. And what was the secret of their energy? They acted not merely for the *present* moment, as too many of us do, but for *hereafter*. They acted for *God*, for *posterity*, for *eternity*. O, my young brethren, would you be useful men? Study the character of the Puritans. Study the character of the patriarchs, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Learn there the connexion which God has established between present and posthumous usefulness. Act from a principle of faith; act, every one of you, with his eye on hereafter; then it may be said of you too, "being dead, he yet speaketh;" and then, without presumption, you may say of yourselves, like another son of this Seminary,\* "We are little men, but our influence must be felt around the globe." O when shall we get back again to the wisdom of our fathers, and learn that all our colleges and schools should be founded for Christ and the church;

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\* Rev. S. J. Mills.

—that all our individual, and Christian, and literary enterprises should be planned on the same sacred principle; and should be consecrated to the glory of God, and the good of coming generations!

In another view, this wise regard to futurity will promote our usefulness, *by regulating our anticipations*. Why is it that this world is so full of sighs, and sad faces, and broken hearts? Why is it that even Christians and ministers often live under a dark cloud, and become peevish, irresolute, inactive, and perhaps sink into a mopish melancholy? They are *disappointed* men. They have cherished a thousand childish expectations, not authorised by the providence or the word of God. The stroke that awakened them from Elysian dreams of happiness, sunk them in despondence. But a wise *foresight of futurity*, moderates our hopes from this world; it prevents disappointment, prepares us for trials, sustains our resolution, and fortifies our hearts for unremitting and vigorous discharge of duty.

I will barely mention another way in which the same principle will promote our usefulness, *by stimulating our efforts*. Why is it that nine tenths of the world are *behind-hand* in their work, both for time and eternity? It is an unwise *reliance on hereafter*. It is an indefinite postponement of present duty, in the hope of a more convenient season. But he who has been well instructed, knows that futurity will come to us, laden with its own duties. He knows that tomorrow will not be long enough for the labor of *two* days; that the proper work of to-day, must be done *to-day*. He works with his eye towards the sun, and as he sees that hastening to set, he doubles his diligence.

This introduces the last topic of my discourse, which I will mention as a

*Third reason* why we should act with a wise regard to futurity, and that is,—IT WILL PREPARE US TO DIE.

Our immortal existence, my dear hearers, is but just begun. What is *past* of this existence, has been momentary;—what is *to come* will be eternal. Our *futurity* then, is comparatively our *all*. And what is to be the condition of this futurity? Happy

or miserable, according to the character we form in the present life. And how long will this life last? Ask experience, ask revelation;—both are silent. “I must work the works of him that sent me,” said the Saviour,” while it is day;—the night cometh, in which no man can work.” Some of you, who listen to this discourse, probably have not *begun* the work which God has given you to do. Now you are on trial for an endless hereafter. There will be no season of probation beyond the grave. Your whole eternity is suspended on the fleeting moment that remains of this short life. Soon you must die;—and then,—your state will be unalterably fixed. O, can you think of this, and forget the *long futurity* that is before you? Can you think of this, and feel easy while your preparation for that futurity is not *begun*?

You know that, even in this seat of sacred learning, distinguished by most important privileges, as a place of residence, there is *no guarantee of life*. Since I first saw this place, death has continually gone his wonted rounds among us;—he has entered nearly every dwelling of this neighborhood, and some of them repeatedly. Once and again, God has seen fit to clothe these families in mourning, and has called them to mingle their sympathies with each other, and with a dying world around them, in scenes of severe suffering and bereavement. “Our fathers,” too,—who laid the foundation of these Institutions, and cherished them by their counsels and prayers, “Our fathers, where are they?”\* Their course on earth is finished;—they rest from their labors, and their works follow them. Venerable men!—they were prepared to die. They had acted for God, and for posterity;—acted from the far-reaching plans of a comprehensive benevolence, embracing the remotest corners of the globe, and the utmost limits of time. Truly, they were pre-

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\* Since my connexion with the Theological Seminary, seven of its Trustees have been removed by death,—six of its Visitors,—and six of its earliest and greatest benefactors, male and female;—leaving, of the honored number last alluded to, and of the original Board of Visitors, only a single survivor.

pared to die,—in the triumphs of an exalted faith, that could look downward on ages to come, and anticipate the results of their own instrumentality, under God, in hastening forward the millennial glory of the church.—Like them, live then for God and for futurity. Live so that survivors shall have reason to bless God, for the influence which you have exerted on those around you; and then, you too will be prepared to die. And should no sculptured marble designate the spot where your mortal remains moulder to dust; should no name or memorial of you be preserved among the living, still, your witness will be in heaven, and your record on high.

My dear hearers, I would not if I could, and could not if I would, lift the veil of futurity which conceals the hour, when you will be summoned into the presence of your Judge. But there is one thing concerning you, which I know with absolute certainty,—*you are sinners*. Another thing I know,—*you must die*,—and *may die soon*. And one more thing I know,—if you are strangers to repentance and faith, you are not *prepared* to die. And oh,—*should you die unprepared*, what will become of you forever? Think of this. Your whole *futurity* may hang on the *present* moment. Think of this,—*now*.

# S E R M O N I V .

## HISTORICAL.

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### RELIGIOUS DECISION.

*DANIEL 6: 10.\* Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber, towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*

THE man whose inflexible piety is here recorded, was a descendant from the royal family of David; and, while yet a youth, was carried captive to Babylon. To understand the text, we must look at the facts mentioned in the preceding history.

The astrologers and magicians of Babylon were summoned by a royal mandate, to explain to Nebuchadnezzar, a very per-

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\* Bishop Horne has a sermon on this text, which first suggested to me the purpose of preaching on it myself. His object, however, and mine are so different, that there is almost no resemblance between the two discourses, except that occasional coincidence of remark, which is unavoidable in exhibiting the *same facts*.



plexing *dream*, which had wholly escaped from his recollection. In a tone of arbitrary authority he made the demand; ‘Tell me this dream, which is gone from me, and the interpretation thereof, or you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses be made a dung-hill.’ The astrologers replied, that the thing was *impossible*; that no king or ruler ever made such a demand from any magician; that if he could *repeat* the dream, they were ready to give the interpretation. The king’s answer was short and decisive; ‘Tell me the *dream*, and then I shall know that ye *can* show the *interpretation* thereof.’ But if you will not do this, you are deceivers, and there is but one decree for you.

An edict was accordingly issued, that all the wise men of Babylon should be destroyed, and the chief Captain was charged with its execution. Daniel was of course proscribed with the rest. In this emergency, his God enabled him to reveal the dream, and give the interpretation. Surprised at this discovery, the king fell on his face before the prophet, loaded him with marks of his princely favor, and made him governor over all Babylon. From this time, Daniel continued in high reputation, so that when Darius the Persian came to the throne, he was made Prime minister of the empire. The native princes of the country viewed with malignant envy the elevation of this stranger, and resolved on his ruin. But enmity itself, baffled in its search for his faults, was obliged to pronounce his eulogy, in the very act of plotting his destruction: “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”

By the dexterous flattery of these statesmen, Darius was induced to publish an edict, that—“Whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man, save of the king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions’ den.” What could Daniel do in this perilous conjuncture? Abjure his God, and his closet?—or fly to some secret refuge, from the storm that was gathering to burst on his head? The text informs us what he did. “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber, towards Jerusalem,

he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime." Here is a simple exhibition of that magnanimity, which arises from consistent and decided piety. *The subject which this example suggests for our consideration, is RELIGIOUS DECISION.*

The importance of this character in a good man, will be manifest, if we duly attend to the two following enquiries,—*What things are implied in religious decision; and what are its practical operations?*

I. WHAT THINGS ARE IMPLIED IN THE CHARACTER OF RELIGIOUS DECISION.

Among the particulars which time will permit me to mention, under this head, I begin with observing, that it implies a CLEAR AND STEADY PERCEPTION OF TRUTH AND DUTY.

The *bigot* may be heroic in action or suffering, while his belief is mere assent to authority, without rational conviction, and without evidence. He does not examine, and compare, and reason. It is enough for him that he thinks as he thinks; of course, his opinions never change by argument. This is not decision, but *obstinacy*.

On the opposite extreme, the *fickle* man forms and changes his opinions at random. Like the caprice of childhood, his creed and his conduct, even in the momentous concerns of religion, are determined by the transient impulse of circumstances; so that he is "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."

In respect to religious opinions, and more or less in respect to *all* opinions, want of stability arises very much from want of clear, and comprehensive views. The man who is satisfied with looking at one *part* of a subject, will form a partial opinion of that subject. When he looks at another part of the same subject, he will form a *different* opinion; and thus, while the *subject* remains the same, his *judgment* concerning it will vary, just according to the aspect in which he has happened to see it last; while a view of the *whole subject* at once, would have given him a consistent, settled opinion, subject to no fluctuation. So

far as any one is influenced by religious principle, he dares not form opinions as to any momentous subject, on a partial and transient glance at that subject. The fervent Christian, I am aware, may entertain narrow views on some subjects, which views deserve no better name than *bigotry*. This however springs not from the nature, but from the defectiveness of his religion. At the same time, the unlettered Christian, in his simple reliance on the testimony of God, may have a belief as immovable, and as *rational* too, even on a mysterious subject, as though he were a philosopher. But the kind of decision which I am describing, is connected only with *enlightened* piety.

Now the man of genuine decision, in judging what is true, or what is right, knows how to use his own understanding. With implicit deference to the word of God, as a perfect standard in religious enquiries, he searches and thinks for himself. He thinks *independently*; superior both to that pride of singularity, which is predisposed to reject received opinions, and to that servile acquiescence, which bows to their authority, without examination. He thinks *impartially*, unbiassed by passion or prejudice. He thinks *clearly and systematically*. His eye penetrates, at a glance, those mists which obscure the vision of common minds. Not satisfied with surveying the exterior of subjects, he examines principles, weighs opposing evidence, and pursues the investigation to a regular result. This gives strength and stability to his opinions. Why should he be timid and wavering, while there is firm footing under him at every step? He neither believes nor acts without *reasons*; reasons which he sees distinctly; which he weighs deliberately; which he can exhibit and explain to others; and therefore he is above those fluctuations of character, to which feeble and indecisive men are liable.

*Another ingredient essential to religious decision, is RECTITUDE OF DESIGN.*

Men without the aids of religion, I am aware, have often exhibited great *firmness* and *dignity* of spirit. History and poetry have blazoned the dauntless intrepidity of military heroes,

and the magnanimity of patriots and sages, who have figured in the tragedies of the world. Many an ancient heathen possessed the same noble independence of him whom the poet meant to celebrate by saying,

“ He would not flatter Neptune for his trident,  
Nor Jove for his power to thunder.”

In the native structure of their minds, some men are distinguished by strength of intellect, daring resolution, and superiority to whatever is mean in action. At the same time we see that the page of history which records the most memorable achievements of human energy, is often tarnished with the blackest stains of human guilt. That terrible energy of wickedness, which sometimes resembles the whirlwind in its desolating effects, falls far below the greatness of real constancy. It is always associated with some radical weakness in the elements of the soul. It is the offspring of malignant passions, or of pride. It is often the mere ostentation of boldness, while the heart trembles at the “ sound of a shaken leaf.” “ *Conscience* makes cowards ” of guilty men. Its accusations produce misgiving and dismay. “ The wicked flee when no man pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion.” The man of religious integrity has no inward trepidation. He is calm, firm and steady, in his purposes and actions.

*Another thing requisite to this stability of character, is COINCIDENCE OF THE JUDGMENT, THE PASSIONS AND HABITS.*

The leading principle of action in one man, is to stand well in the opinion of his fellow men. *Custom* is his law, and his conduct must vary with the changes of custom, as the weathercock veers to every point of the compass with the changes of the wind. Another is governed by *selfish interest*, and is therefore subject to endless fluctuations of character, according to the ever varying influence which circumstances have, or are supposed to have, on his favorite objects. Another is governed by occasional *excitements*. The animal or intellectual temperament is so constituted, that reason is not supreme but *subordi-*

nate, in directing the man. The *passions* not only interpose their influence, but claim a controlling ascendancy over the judgment ; so that you can never predict how the man's judgment will decide in a given case, because he is governed by influences which cannot be foreseen. This instability of character is much increased in some men by bodily temperament ; so that as one remarks, " a *lowering sky* strongly inclines them to form an opinion of themselves and of other things, very differently from what they would form when the *sun shines*, and the *heavens are serene*."

The understanding and the affections, including the passions, are the two grand principles of action in men. When these are combined in influence; they give the strongest impulse to all the powers of mind and body. The uniform cooperation of these, for any length of time, produces a third influence, which we call *habit* ; and which exerts a commanding ascendancy over the conduct. But the slightest acquaintance with men may show us, that these powers may be at variance with each other. The understanding may dissent from the passions ;—one strong passion may dissent from another ;—*ambition* or *sensuality* may be counteracted by *avarice* : *conscience* may remonstrate against inclination ; while habit in defiance of every other principle, may lead the man captive at its will. In such a case, he is divided against himself, and all his movements are marked either with rashness or with hesitation and imbecility. It is thus that some who might be giants in the strength of their piety, are weak as other men. But in the man of *consistent* and *stable* piety, these different principles cooperate. The judgment, the conscience, the heart, the passions ; the animal, intellectual, and moral habits, exert a united influence that give strength and dignity to the character.

*The last thing which I shall mention as requisite to religious decision, is TRUST IN GOD.* In this I include a full belief of his infinite perfection ; a devout regard to his universal and all-disposing providence ; a cheerful reliance on his protection, in the discharge of duty ; and, in a word, all those habits of active pi-

ety, which result from communion with God, from the conviction that our hearts are naked to his eye, and that every moral agent must receive from him a righteous and eternal retribution. These exalted sentiments give firmness to the heart, and stability to the actions of their possessor. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion which cannot be removed."

Such are the qualities of character that constitute religious decision. Let us enquire,

## II. WHAT ARE ITS PRACTICAL OPERATIONS.

In illustrating this head, I shall refer you to the example of that great and good man, whose character furnishes the subject of this discourse, and exhibits the genuine, practical influence of those principles, which we have been considering. From the history of Daniel, it appears that he was,

*In the first place*, EMINENT FOR HIS HABITS OF DEVOTION. This we may learn, not simply from the fact that he visited his closet three times in a day, but that he did this in circumstances peculiarly *unfavorable* to the cultivation of personal piety. Recollect that while a youth, he was torn away from all the religious institutions of his native country, and became a stranger and a captive in a foreign land. There he was surrounded by heathens and infidels; by the rites of idolatry; the fascinations of a splendid and impious court; and all that array of pomp and luxury, and licentiousness, which powerfully tend to withdraw the heart of any man, especially the heart of a young man, from God. Yet the established piety of Daniel was not shaken.

Recollect too that he was a very *busy* man; being the first of the three presidents of Persia. Such was the confidence reposed in his capacity, integrity, and experience, that on the accession of a new monarch, who was comparatively a stranger to his own dominions, the burden of public affairs devolved peculiarly on this distinguished officer of the government. How does the man of feeble and fluctuating piety regard the duty of prayer? He performs it with a good degree of uniformity, perhaps, when the *world* does not thrust itself between his heart and his God. But, when the farm, or the counting-room, the

study, or the social circle, urge their special claims on the time that should be consecrated to his closet, he yields without a struggle. Not so with Daniel. Amid all the labors and temptations of office, he stood erect, with his eye fixed on heaven, and the earth, and all its little interests under his feet. Busy as he was, this world must keep its place, and not intrude on his hallowed seasons of retirement. Under the cares of a great empire, sufficient to overwhelm a common mind, his steady piety found no excuse for the neglect of *prayer*. He *sought* no excuse. He would *accept* no excuse. Not all the business, nor all the temptations, nor all the authority of Persia could *force* an excuse upon him.

The devotion of Daniel was *systematic*. He had a stated *place* of prayer. I know indeed that the worship of God, which is offered "in spirit and in truth," is acceptable in *any* place; but he who knew what the world is, and what the heart of man is, saw important reasons for the precept; "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and shut thy door." And any one who shall attempt to hold communion with God, amid the hurry and levity of the steamboat or the stage coach, will understand why this steadfast saint in Babylon went into his *chamber* to pray.

He had also stated *times* of prayer; "he kneeled upon his knees *three* times a day." While it must be admitted that this too is a point, which does not belong to the *essence* of prayer, it is doubtless more important to the life, and comfort, and even *existence* of a devotional spirit, than is commonly supposed. On this subject, one of the most devout men of modern days, says: "Love is the best casuist, and resolves or prevents a thousand scruples which perplex those who only serve God from constraint." The humble Christian will not need to be told "how *often* he must pray, any more than how often he must converse with an earthly friend." Yet whatever other point in Christian experience is unsettled, it is doubtless certain that *stated seasons* of prayer, are indispensable to the growth of piety. The man who is so much the slave of circumstances, in

*common* affairs as to forego his regular food, and exercise, and rest, may *live*, but cannot *enjoy* life ; he cannot, for any long time, possess vigorous health of body. He who has so little firmness of religious principle, as to intermit his regular, secret devotions, from indolence or hurry, or complaisance to friends, may be a Christian still, perhaps, in a state of temporary but woful backsliding. But certainly he is not a decided, consistent Christian. He does not “ keep his own heart with all diligence.” He is not prepared for his upward flight, to live in heaven, like Enoch, who “ walked with God.” Nor yet is he prepared to live in Babylon, like Daniel, who “ kneeled upon his knees, *three times* in a day, and prayed and gave thanks.”

From the history of Daniel, it appears in the SECOND place, that he was EMINENT FOR COURAGE.

The law, you remember, made it *death* to pray. What would a timid, worldly believer have done in such a case ? At once he would have attempted a compromise betwixt conscience and safety. He would have said, ‘ why should I sacrifice my *life* to the malignity of these enemies. Better, for one month not to pray at all ;—or to pray in heart, and omit the form ; or to seek some sequestered place, where my devotions will be unknown to my accusers ; or to lock my door ;—or even to abandon my house altogether.’ But the intrepid Daniel was not so easily driven from his duty. When the alternative came, without one moment’s hesitation, he was ready to meet it. The simple question was, shall I disobey the king of Babylon, or the king of heaven ? When he knew that the writing was signed, which destined him to the lion’s den, not a syllable of apology, of entreaty, or remonstrance, escaped his lips ; nor yet of that defiance, which weakness often assumes in moments of desperation. With a greatness of soul, becoming a saint of the most high God, “ he went to his chamber, and his window being open towards Jerusalem,” alluding to a passage in Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple, “ he kneeled upon his knees,—as he *did aforetime*.” Here is the energy and dignity of true courage. In the prospect of a terrible death, you see



no change in the man ; no display, no concealment of his devotions ; no policy to elude, resist, or retaliate the measures of his enemies ; no petition to Darius or to Jehovah for their destruction.

Now, my hearers, all the steady resolution, and tranquillity of this exalted man, is explained by one simple principle,—he knew that he was *doing his duty*. Do we esteem courage a great and admirable quality ? Let us seek to understand it. Real courage is consistent with *fear*. Not the fear that shrinks from personal suffering, from the frown of power, or the sneer of fools ; but that shrinks from *doing wrong*. The guilty worm, that writhes under the anguish of a colic, or a broken limb, and starts at the thought of death ; and yet defies his Maker's wrath, and jests with damnation, may be called brave. The youth, who spurns the awful denunciations of the Bible, as well as the grave counsels of experience, and plunges into the gulf of licentiousness, may be hailed by his fellows in sin, as superior to vulgar weakness, and be called brave. The man whose chief dignity consists in understanding the point of honour ; with whom there is no law but the caprice of passion, no tribunal but single combat, no shame to be avoided but the reproach of madmen, and no atonement to be accepted for the slightest affront, but the expiation of blood ; may be called brave. The hardened veteran in sin, who ends his life by poison or the pistol, and rushes unprepared into the presence of his God, may be called brave. Yes, and the maniac, who leaps from a precipice, may be called brave.

But in the sober estimate which religion attaches to human conduct, that resolution which acts before it deliberates, is rashness ; that which acts from no principle but regard to human opinions, is pusillanimity ; that which acts *without* reason, is folly ; that which acts *against* reason, is obstinacy or phrenzy.

And what is the courage of the established Christian ? Is it a haughty indifference to the feelings of others ?—an ostentatious independence, that erects itself in contempt of obligations human and divine ? It is the dignity of *religious principle*, which

in the eye of a good man, sinks all other objects into insignificance, compared with his duty to God. In things indifferent he walks with the world. No studied preciseness in trifles marks his character. But does he come to a point where conscience *doubts* whether an action is right? There he *stops*, and *considers*. Does he clearly see that action to be *wrong*? There he *stops*,—and *stands*. Urge him to go on;—entice him;—threaten him;—there he *stands* inflexible; and if the case requires it, stands alone against an opposing world.

Let ridicule sneer; let importunity plead; let authority frown, he is prepared for the shock. The scoffs of dying tongues he dares to encounter; the terrors of the stake, the gibbet, or the lions' den, he dares to encounter. But there are things that he dares not do;—he is not bold enough to defy his *God*; he has not courage to rush into everlasting burnings.

Look now at the savage *warrior*, whose courage is ferocity; at the *infidel*, whose boldness is impious audacity; at the *duellist*, whose honor is ignominy and whose intrepidity is madness; at the *military* chief, whose boasted thirst of glory, and contempt of death, push him on to the cannon's mouth, while "he trembles, perhaps at his own shadow in a church-yard;" and I affirm that the heroism of Daniel is superior to all that has been celebrated under the name of courage, by the splendid monuments, and the clamorous war-shouts of a misjudging world. Nor does this great man stand alone as an example of the heroism which religion inspires. I might point you to Paul, singing in the dungeon at Philippi; to Luther, braving the thunders of the Vatican; to that female martyr who said, "I cannot *dispute* for Christ, but I can *die* for him;" to the hallelujahs of Latimer and Ridley, triumphing at the stake, and ascending to glory in chariots of fire. I might point you to the aged Eleazar, high priest of the Jewish church, whom the haughty Antiochus required to abjure his religion. "Prepare your instruments of torment," said the venerable man, "kindle your flames to a fiercer rage. I stand without fear, amidst your threatening en-

gines and implements of martyrdom. I will not save these silver locks, by violating the laws of my country and of my God."

The time permits me to mention only a few points of *reflection* suggested by this discourse.

*The FIRST is, that worldly and skeptical men betray the weakness of their own principles, when they represent the Christian religion as inconsistent with magnanimity.* Strangers themselves to the meekness, contrition, and devotion which the gospel enjoins, they suppose these to imply debasement of spirit; and look for greatness of character only among *philosophers* and *conquerors*, whom the world have called illustrious. But what *is* greatness? Can we predicate it of man, independently of his qualities as an immortal being;—or of his actions, independently of principles and motives? Then the glitter of nobility is not superior to the plumage of the peacock; nor the valor of Alexander, to the fury of a tiger; nor the sensual delights of Epicurus, to those of any animal that roams the forest.

You must take into the account the *relations*, the *obligations*, the *prospects* of man, before you can determine what conduct is worthy of his rank, as an agent, intelligent, accountable, and immortal. Can that action then, be stamped with littleness, which is commanded and approved by the greatest Being in the universe? Can that character be honorable which leads to "shame and everlasting contempt?"—or that contemptible, which will be honored before God, and angels, and assembled worlds?

That the unhappy men to whom I have alluded, deceive themselves, on this momentous point, by the mere show of argument, is evident to my mind from one familiar but solemn fact. If the believer is heir to a crown and a kingdom, beyond this momentary life, he may well contemplate the struggles of dissolution, and the coldness of the grave without dismay. Hence the serenity and dignity with which his faith often triumphs in the final conflict, and whispers with his last breath,—“see in what peace a Christian can die.” But in that “honest

hour," where is the magnanimity of the infidel? — When the voice of conscience is not drowned by the whirl of business, nor the clamor of mirth; when all is solitude and stillness in the chamber of dissolution; when the soul is left alone, to its reflections, in the last struggles of mortality, on the brink of a dreadful, unknown hereafter; — where is the magnanimity of the infidel? Let the death-bed of Voltaire and of Paine answer.

*My SECOND reflection is, that eminent usefulness must be founded on stable piety.* The fact that Daniel could sustain his load of cares, as prime minister for the vast empire of Persia, and yet not yield to any interruption of his stated devotions, shows not merely that he possessed uncommon vigor of talent, and skill in business,—it shows more emphatically that the spring of this wonderful energy was *religion*. Look at this public man: (O that all public men were such as he!) You see him, amidst the bustle of a *busy* court, a diligent student of the Bible. You see him, amidst the excesses of a *luxurious* court, a man of rigid temperance; preferring his simple meal of *pulse* and *water*, to his portion of the "king's meat and wine."

The honor of a really useful man comes not from stars and titles, but from what he *is*, and what he *does*. Call him to an elevated station, and he confers dignity upon office, not office upon him. Call him to meet danger, and he is heroic. Call him to achieve a difficult enterprize, and he is great in action. But would you know the secret of his strength? Look to his inward principles; his clear and comprehensive views of duty, his self-consistency, his conscious integrity, his trust in God. That man cannot slumber nor trifle away life, in a world where so much is to be *done*. He is an *active* man; active for God; active, too, from motives that bear the light, and seek no cover of artifice. He loses no time in crooked devices. He stoops not to that cunning, which, while it dexterously circumvents others, promotes a man's influence to-day, and ruins it the rest of his life. He acts with a *discretion*, that looks at means and consequences, in distinction from that rashness which makes efforts, and then asks *what* is to be done, and *how* and *where* is it

to be done? The man of useful action is *ardent*. Obstacles that baffle weakness, increase his resolution. At the same time he is *unostentatious*. The power that sustains and guides the planets acts with a noiseless energy. Greatness is simple in its movements. It is above eccentricity and display. "We are more indebted, says one, to the regular, sober, constant course of the sun, than to the glare of the comet. The one indeed occupies our papers, but the other enriches our fields and gardens. We gaze at the strangeness of the one, but we live by the influence of the other."

In the light of this subject, brethren, what manner of man ought a *Christian minister* to be? As a prophet of the living God, Daniel maintained his integrity in *Babylon*; and when duty required it, boldly carried his message of reproof to the *monarch* on his throne. The royal mandate that forbid him to pray, he boldly *disobeyed*. Had he sacrificed his faith and his conscience to the love of popularity, or the favor of his prince, no miraculous deliverance from the lions' den would have called forth the proclamation of Darius, that all his subjects should "tremble before the God of Daniel." The enemies of Christ, honored *his* intrepid fidelity in the acknowledgment, "We know that thou teachest the way of God in truth; for thou regardest not the person of man." And for what purpose, I ask, is any one called to minister in holy things, if it is not to teach "the way of God in truth?" How can he discharge his duties without religious decision and honesty? In what possible case can integrity, and firmness, and dignity of principle be demanded, if not in *him*? He is to preach a religion, against which the prejudices of every unsanctified heart, are arrayed in hostility; 'a religion which has had to fight its way, by inches, against the opposition of selfishness and superstition; against the rancour of malignity; the arrogance of power; the fascination of pleasure; the sneer of skepticism; and the fire of persecution.' Enlisted in such a cause, how shall he act? When he sees his guilty hearers rejecting the only Saviour, and ruining their souls,

shall he *say* that they are guilty,—or not? When he sees them in danger of eternal death, shall he *say* that they are in danger,—or not? When he sees error vaunting itself under the imposing patronage of fashion, and wealth, and genius, and taste, shall he *say* that it is error,—or not? He who seeks only a reputation or a maintenance from the ministry, may *flatter* the depravity of his hearers; but how think you will he stand in the judgment? What kindred can he claim with the glorified spirit of Daniel? Oh, what place in the world of despair awaits him, who thus “prostitutes and shames his noble office,” and trifles with the most sacred employment under heaven! Dear Christian brethren, think on the dread *responsibility*, under which *we* act who are ambassadors of Christ; and then you will not cease to *pray* for us, ‘that we may open our mouth, and speak *boldly*, as we ought to speak, the mystery of the gospel.’

In the light of this subject, brethren, I ask also, what sort of men ought Christians to be? And what sort of Christians are they, whose supreme standard of character is conformity to the world? Who never *believe* on the simple testimony of God, nor *act* on his simple authority;—but who must know what *others* around them believe, before they know what is *true*; and how *others* will feel and act, before they know what is *right*? We must say that if they *are* Christians at all, in the temperament and tone of their piety, they are at a woful, *woful* remove from the spirit of Daniel and Paul.

Finally;—there is one more question, before I close, which I must ask *you*, my dear hearers, who are in the *habit of neglecting prayer*. God and your consciences know to whom, in these seats, this character belongs. Suppose then that you had been placed in the circumstances of Daniel, at Babylon, my question is, how would *you have felt and acted*? If the remoteness of the scene renders it difficult for you to frame an answer, let us vary the question. Suppose you were told to-day, that the supreme authority of your own country have enacted a law, which forbids you to offer a single prayer to God, on penalty of imprisonment and death;—how would you feel? At once you

would exclaim,—oppressive, unreasonable, cruel law!—*Cruel* law?—Say then, is there no *cruelty* to your own soul, in that voluntary choice of your heart, which shuts you out from all the blessedness of communion with God?—which bars up the door of your closet, and denies you all access to the Father of your spirit? Yes,—there is a tyranny in that voluntary alienation of your heart from God, which is more *cruel* than any tyranny of eastern despotism. It debars you from happiness now, and, if continued, it will render your damnation so certain, that no decree of earth or of heaven could make it more inevitable.

O ye prisoners of hope! whom God has made free,—and made candidates for an eternity of joy, why will you put forth your hands, and bind yourselves with chains of eternal darkness, to be outcasts from God and happiness!—To-day, he invites you to live;—why will you die!

# S E R M O N    V .

## HORTATORY.

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### THE CARELESS SINNER WARNED.

ISAIAH 1 : 18. *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.*

THE people of Judah, to whom this language was addressed, had become great sinners. Even their appointed feasts and solemn meetings were an abomination to him who “looketh on the heart.” The only alternative before them was deep repentance, or speedy ruin. In these circumstances, God, by his prophet, called them to pause in their career of sin, and think on their own condition and prospects.

To the same duty he calls every careless sinner in this assembly to-day. Could a stranger from a distant world step into this place of worship, and be told the religious advantages which we enjoy, and the obligations which rest upon us, doubtless he would take it for granted that every individual here is a real Christian. But no one who has *lived* in this world, and had any just views concerning the moral state of its inhabitants, would feel authorised to take this for granted, concerning any



promiscuous assembly of human beings. On the contrary, without pretending to know any heart, must I not, as a preacher of the gospel, presume that some of you, my dear hearers, are without God, in the world? Are not some of you perfectly conscious that such is your present condition? You have heard perhaps hundreds of sermons, which you considered as addressed to *others*. I ask you now, each one individually, to listen to this sermon, as addressed to *you in particular*. It is addressed, not to your passions at all, but to your understanding and conscience. The range of my remarks will unavoidably be more miscellaneous than is commonly proper in a sermon,—but nothing will be said which you cannot easily comprehend and remember. You have hitherto neglected a serious attention to religion, as the one thing needful;—and you purpose, at present to continue in the same neglect. Is this course justifiable? Is it safe? Is it right? “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.”

If the tomb which receives your mortal remains, were to cover in oblivion your character and actions, then might you say with careless levity, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.” But if a few short years, at the utmost, will usher you into the unchanging realities of eternity, can it be proper for you to pass heedlessly on, without any serious reflection, and yet without any hope beyond the grave? Certainly it cannot be proper. Let us proceed then to look at some of those considerations, which demand your present and solemn attention.

1. You know that you have a rational existence. You see the glorious orbs which shine above you, roll on and measure out your days. You find yourself possessed of a body, “fearfully and wonderfully made.” You find a thinking existence within you;—something distinct from all that appertains to matter;—something that perceives, remembers, loves, and hates. You find yourself an inhabitant of this earth,—for *what*? Is this life your *all*? Was your soul formed, with its noble faculties, just to wake into a momentary existence and then be extinguished in annihilation? Do you believe that you were

placed here, like the poor brutes, to eat and drink, breathe and walk, and sigh, a few days, and then sink into eternal *night* and *nothing*? No;—a response comes from every bosom,—no. I shall outlive time and all its changes. When “the sun is turned to darkness and the stars to dust,” I shall exist still in some unknown hereafter.

2. I shall presume that you believe the existence of a God. The fool may say in his *heart*, there is none; but certainly no serious doubt on this point can be the dictate of any man’s *understanding*. Whence came this system of things that surrounds us? Who raised this mighty fabric of worlds? Who preserves it? Is all this the result of *chance*? Chance is *nothing*; and nothing cannot produce and govern a system of worlds. Did *men* or angels create the sun and moon and stars and earth? Men and angels cannot create a *fly*, nor a *blade of grass*. Besides, how came men and angels by their *own* existence! It came from the uncreated God, the former of all things.

If there is a God, he is intelligent and omnipotent. He knows all things. Those whom he has made and whom he upholds every moment, he must *see* every moment. He must be acquainted with all your actions and purposes. You cannot hide from his searching eye; you cannot escape out of his dominion.

3. I shall presume too, that you believe the Bible to be of divine authority. That it is so, is proved by a flood of evidence which cannot be even noticed in this place. Did I suppose you to entertain any doubt on this point, I would simply ask, concerning any scheme of infidelity that you can name, why are its disciples generally loose in sentiments and morals? Why do they discard prayer, and all other duties of practical piety? Why are they so often filled with dismay, at the hour of death? Those must be bad *principles*, which make bad *men*. That scheme must be fallacious, which alienates a creature from his Creator, and in the very proof of his immortality, furnishes a *motive* to take refuge, in a *cheerless* skepticism, or in annihilation. No prudent man will risk eternal consequences on a bold

presumption, which at the utmost, can give but a momentary repose in sin ; and then must leave the soul in anguish, without consolation, and without hope. You must therefore admit the Bible to be the word of God, unless you close your eyes against the light ; and regardless of truth and warning, regardless of all that may be joyful or terrible in eternity, resolve to rush upon the dread experiment.

4. It must be farther presumed, that you believe yourself and all men to be sinful. Here again, if I supposed you to have any doubts, I would ask you to look into the world around you. Read its history. Whence all the penal laws of every age and country, against wickedness, if men are not wicked ? When men make a common bargain, why do they esteem a paper bond, as better security than their neighbor's honesty ? If men are not depraved beings, how comes it to pass that, in every period, and on every side of the globe, they have universally *acted* like depraved beings ; and have invariably considered *each other* as deserving this character ? If you have any doubts concerning human depravity, after looking abroad into the world, then look into your *own heart*. If that is not enough, then look into the *Bible*. Here you will find the point settled. Here your character is drawn by the unerring pen of inspiration. You are a *sinner*.

5. You know that God cannot consistently allow the transgression of his own law. The honour of his character and the good of the universe require that he should maintain this law. In the exercise of perfect and unlimited benevolence he has threatened an awful destruction to all his impenitent enemies. You know that he is in "one mind and none can turn him." You know that he is *able* to execute his threatenings. Who then can hope to harden himself against such a God, and prosper ? The case is plain ;—if you die in your sins, you must lie down in sorrow.

6. The subject now assumes a character of very serious importance. In the sober conviction of your own understanding, the point is settled, that you must exist forever ! exist too eith-

er in glory or in despair. Have you ever thought on this amazing subject? Will you be persuaded to think on it *now*? Have you indeed a soul that must dwell in happiness or misery without end? What then is the *worth* of that soul? Thrones and empires, are trifles in the comparison! "Earth and skies are dust upon the scale!" We dread exquisite pain, though it be of short continuance! How do the hearts of the strong and brave sink within them, under the anguish of an acute fever, or a broken limb? What man in his senses, would deem it a light thing to endure such pain for a thousand years, for one year, or one month! Who then *can* dwell with devouring fire! who can inhabit everlasting burnings! Eternal misery outstretches and overwhelms human comprehension. Do you believe that there is, verily, such an allotment of suffering for all the ungodly? Can you deliberately view yourself as exposed every moment, to plunge into it, and remain indifferent as an atheist or a stone? Is it possible that you should feel *easy*, in such circumstances, for *one hour*?

7. If you have given these considerations their due weight, we are prepared to proceed another step in our reflections. The religion of the gospel opens before us, the only door of hope for perishing sinners. Have you cordially *embraced* this religion? Conscience perhaps stirs within you at this searching enquiry, and gives the honest answer,—'In the midst of light and warnings, I have neglected the great salvation.' *Why* then do you neglect it? "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." Will you say that the system of the gospel is dark, and hard to be understood? Have you faithfully *endeavoured* to understand it? Have you bestowed on it one half, or one hundredth part as much attention as on other subjects comparatively unimportant? Comparatively, did I say? O what other subject is not comparatively unimportant? To the humble Christian, whether his capacity be great or small, the Bible is a *plain* book. Its essential truths and duties are *so* plain that the "Wayfaring men, though fools "*need*" not err therein." Will you say that you have carefully studied the plan of salva-

tion, as revealed in the scriptures, and after all, are not satisfied with it? Then what are its *faults*? Does it place God too high, and sinners too low? He offers to forgive you, if you confess and forsake your sins. Are these hard conditions? Can you ask him to come down from his throne, and save you, on terms that would dishonor *himself*? Can you ask him to be at peace with you, while you love and justify your sins, reject the only Saviour of men, and trample on the law, which that Saviour died to honour and fulfil? No; he will not, he *cannot* do this. "Till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle of his law shall fail." Not one sinner can ever be saved unless he confesses and forsakes his sins. You cannot prosper in arms against omnipotence. The terms of the gospel are written as with a sunbeam; they admit only of *submission* or *destruction*. You are shut up to this alternative: you must *bow* or *perish*.

You see there is one, and *but* one way of escape. That way is as plain and reasonable as you can desire. Indeed it is unalterably fixed, and therefore can never be plainer or easier than it is this moment. What benefit then can result from *delay*? Is it not wise to treat things according to their importance? Does a prudent man stand to exchange salutations with a neighbor, when his house is on fire? In common concerns men act rationally. They are careful in summer to provide for winter; in health for sickness. A wise merchant watches the state of the market. A wise husbandman observes the changes of the seasons, and the proper time to sow and reap. A wise mariner does not sink *himself* in a storm, to save his *goods*. There was a man among the tombs who mangled his own limbs; but he was beside himself. There was a profane Esau, who sold his birthright for a morsel of meat; and a heathen Lysimachus, who exchanged his kingdom for a draught of water; but these you say were foolish men. What then in the light of eternity, must you think of yourself, who can lose your soul, and bury your immortal hopes, without a sigh!

Serious as this language is, you will know hereafter that it is the language of truth and friendship. You slumber on the verge

of ruin ! All that the Christian minister attempts to do in this case, all that he is required to do, all that he *can* do, is to pray for you, and say to you, like Paul to the distracted Jailer, “Do thyself no harm.” Break from this infatuation ! Rouse from this fatal slumber ! If you slight such warnings, given you in love and faithfulness, the day will soon come when you will be exempt from such disquieting importunities. If you should succeed in destroying yourself, you will have as little disturbance from the Bible and the pulpit, from sabbaths, and prayers, and sermons, as you can desire. But know assuredly there will then be a reprover, in your own bosom, whose admonition will be as the sting of a scorpion ; and whose gentlest *whisper* will be *thunder* in your ear.

8. Your reason and conscience probably have thus far assented to the serious statements which I have made. May I now ask, what is your purpose ? Here you are, an immortal being, standing on the small point of probation, betwixt the extremes of endless pain, and endless joy, sustained only by the frail thread of life, which the sword of justice is ready to cut, while the voice of mercy cries ; “Now is the day of salvation.” Will you embrace this salvation ? Two worlds wait your decision. Still perhaps, you hesitate ; still presume on the abused patience of God, for a future season of repentance ; and dare to suspend your immortal welfare on the issue of that presumption. You say, “I cannot think on these serious subjects now. Religion would make me gloomy, and spoil all my happiness.” —*What* happiness ? Are you indeed happy without religion ? The world may promise to make you so,—but does it *fulfil* its promises ?

Have you no disappointments from without ? No moments of anguish within ? No fearful forebodings about hereafter ? You are *not* happy without religion. To prove this, I need only appeal to your own bosom. Be it so that you are among the number of those who are at ease in Zion ; that though now and then startled by a call from the death-bed or the pulpit, you soon dismiss these alarming subjects, and pass along very quiet-

ly, for weeks and months together in sinful *indifference*. Is this *happiness*? If it *is*, will it *last*? When the rod of the Almighty touches your estate, your friends, or yourself, will it keep you tranquil? Will it stand by you in death and judgment? Will your heart remain cold, when the elements shall melt? Will your heart remain firm, when the heavens and the earth are shaken?—No;—serious reflection may perhaps be put off to-day; it may be put off to-morrow; it may be put off a few more days; but as God is true, it cannot be put off *always*. In spite of your heart it will come, it *must* come finally;—it may come speedily. *Religion* make you unhappy!! That religion which sweetens prosperity, and presents a cordial even in the bitter cup? Go to the dungeon at Philippi, and ask what made Paul and Silas sing at midnight, while their backs were smarting under the lash of persecution, and their feet made fast in the stocks. Go and stand by the stake of the blessed martyrs, and listen to their alleluiahs, while their bodies were wrapped in the consuming flame. Go to that house of mourning, and ask what was it that enabled a Christian mother to dedicate her little infant to God, reposing all her hopes for that, and for herself, on the cross of Christ; and in the immediate prospect of death to say, “this is the happiest hour of my life.” Was it a *gloomy* religion that could thus bear up her soul, and fill it with heavenly radiance, in such a moment? Or go to the bereaved, christian husband, and he can tell you that the best consolations of philosophy, are utterly cold and comfortless, in scenes that wring the heart with agony; while religion can give patience, and peace, and joy; and that all the books written by men can do nothing to soothe a wounded spirit, compared with one short sentence of the Bible, “Be still and know that I am God.”

No, my dear hearers, religion is not a gloomy thing. Angels are not gloomy;—men would never be gloomy, if it were not for *want* of religion.—Every step you take towards your last hour, you are liable to be smitten through with some barbed arrow, from which nothing but religion can shield your bosom.

And when you come to that last hour, let me tell you now, that without religion it will be cheerless and awful. No light from heaven will irradiate its gloom. Perhaps a circle of weeping relatives may stand around your bed. Perhaps the gentle, trembling hand of a mother, or sister, may wipe away the cold sweat from your face. But what will this avail, if you have no inward peace, no interceding Saviour, no reconciled God, no hope nor home beyond the grave!

You say, these are solemn truths, I admit; but still I cannot think of becoming truly religious to-day. I must defer this subject for the present. Then, how long? Shall it be *one* year, or *ten* years? Weigh this matter well. There are two serious considerations here:

The *first* is,—what if you should *live* to the time proposed, and then find within you a heart more stubborn than ever? What if that time, when it comes, should find you frantic or senseless with disease, or bereft of all your faculties by some special stroke of Providence? What if, before then, God should utterly withdraw his Spirit, and leave you in judicial blindness, under the curse of a reprobate mind? Your damnation would then be as certain as though you were this moment in hell. “So I gave them up to their own hearts’ lust,” is the most awful language that has ever yet been spoken by Jehovah, concerning any of the human race.

But there is a *second* very serious consideration to come into the account. What reason have you to presume, that your term of probation will last *ten* years, or *one* year longer? Who has given you a guarantee, that it will last another hour? “What is your life?—it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little season, and then vanisheth away.” You see that men do actually die, in every possible variety of circumstances; at home, in the field, on journeys, in bed, at table. From the common scenes of amusement, of business, and of idleness, how many are unexpectedly summoned into eternity. And are *you* proof against the shafts of death? Be not deceived. The hour may be at



hand when some fierce disease shall thrill through your frame, and choke the fountain of life. To-day you may be strong in the enjoyment of health, to-morrow the color of your cheek may be exchanged for a mortal paleness, and your body clothed in the attire of the grave.

I know it is painful to think on these serious subjects, but they *must* be thought of. What will it avail to shut your eyes now?—the light of eternity will force them open; what will it avail to keep these things out of mind, for a few days?—they *must* come home to your bosom shortly. What if you can slumber now in sinful security, the day is coming when you cannot slumber. You cannot slumber amidst the confusion of dissolving worlds. You cannot refuse to hear that voice which will rend the tombs, and summon the dead to stand before the Son of Man. Hearken, then, even now, to the admonition of heaven; “If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.”



**LETTERS.**



# LETTER I.

## ON BOOKS AND READING.

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*Brig Two Friends, at sea, Nov. 16, 1821.*

TO THE SENIOR CLASS IN THE THEOL. SEM., ANDOVER.

GENTLEMEN,

After a week of incessant tossing, amid restless elements, I am able again to sit, and hold my pen, and address to you a few thoughts, which the providence of God allows me no other opportunity to communicate. I bless his name that the pangs of separation from the beloved scene of my labors and enjoyments, may be alleviated by this imperfect intercourse with friends whom I have left, and to whom my heart will often return, with undiminished attachment, during the season of my allotted absence.

In the directions which I sketched out for the regulation of your studies, I promised to recommend a *list of books*, connected with the department of my labors, to be read at such seasons as are not engrossed by regular, classical exercises, and the writing of sermons. This list, which I had not time to prepare, in the hurry of my departure, I will make out the first moments of leisure I can command. The rest of this letter I will devote to some desultory thoughts, on the general subject of *books and reading*.

A preliminary question in this case is, what is the proper *object* of reading? The answer must be, certainly it is not to gratify a mere *fondness for books*. There is now and then a man, who seems to be in a kind of literary reverie, and who reads perpetually, but can scarcely tell why or what he reads. Nor is the spirit of *literary ostentation*, by which some are influenced, any more becoming. To aim high, and grasp at a wide compass of intellectual research, is a laudable characteristic in any young man; but it is a poor ambition that aims only at the reputation of being a great reader.

With a man of sense, the principal object of reading is, the acquisition of knowledge, for his own benefit, and that of others. A subordinate object, especially with a young minister, may properly be the formation of his style. And to a man of more mature age, the chief advantage derived from books may be, that stimulus of the intellectual powers, which is indispensable to maintain their activity, but which can be attained only by constant intercourse with the world of minds, as exhibited through the press.

Bacon says, "Reading makes a *full* man, conversation a *ready* man,—writing an *exact* man." No resources of genius can qualify a man for eminent usefulness, unless he has an extensive acquaintance with books. The mind of Newton might grope its way through a wilderness, untrodden by any human foot; yet a convenient *road* would greatly facilitate its progress. Debar such a man from access to the labors of past ages, and wisdom, at more than "one entrance," would be shut out. Let him debar himself from the use of books, by indolence or a misguided judgment, and the result is even worse. The mind, for want of food and exercise, loses its energy, and passively submits to impressions from surrounding objects; and we cease to look for expansion, and vigor, and capacity for manly effort. To vary the illustration,—it would be no more reasonable to presume that any one, without the aid of books, may become a "full man," in the sense of Bacon, than to suppose that the Mississippi might roll on its flood of waters to the ocean, though

all its tributary streams were cut off, and it were replenished only by occasional drops from the clouds.

Another question is,—what is the proper *extent* of reading? I reply, that, in this age of book-making, no man of common sense will undertake to read *every thing*. Nor can he, in determining what is worth being read, commit himself to the guidance of reviewers; and still less can he confide in the literary notices of booksellers. The scale on which these things are conducted, in our country, is by no means so exceptionable, as in some others;—but it is bad enough. Among our public men there are some who conscientiously decline, in every case, to recommend a book beyond their knowledge of it, and honest conviction of its merits. Still the author or publisher may find men of facile conscience, who will give a name, deemed respectable by the public, commending in terms of unmeasured approbation a book, which they never read, perhaps never *saw*.

Nor will the man of common sense be in danger of presuming that the most important books for him to read, are those most *recently published*. The presumption ought to be the other way, unless the peculiarity of the subject, or the distinguished reputation of the author, in any case form an exception. There may be a good reason for reading a book that is destined to be forgotten in ten years; but such a reason cannot embrace the whole range of literary wares that crowd the booksellers' shops.

But how is the inexperienced student to know the relative value of a book, before he has read it?—Just as he is to know the relative value of a medicine, before he has taken it. In both cases, he must to some extent, exercise confidence in others, who are competent to give him counsel. From such men he can generally get some impartial estimate of a *new book*, sufficient to answer his purpose, instead of relying on those who, from mercantile motives, are tempted to overrate its value. At any rate, if he is in doubt, he can let that book alone for the present, and read some of those elementary, *standard* works, that have stood the test of time, and concerning which he has the testimony of judges perfectly competent and disinterested.

One such book, distinguished for richness of thought, may contribute more to his useful stock of knowledge, than scores of ephemeral volumes. If I may be allowed here to speak of my own experience, as a theological student, I would say that to *Edwards on the Will*, which I read at three several times, before I entered on the ministry, besides frequent reviews of it since, I am more indebted than to all other human productions. The aid which it gave, was to me invaluable, in forming my intellectual habits, in fixing my doctrinal opinions, and especially in curing certain tendencies of my mind to Arminian and skeptical speculations, by showing me that there is no consistent resting place between Calvinism and Atheism. The treatises of the same profound author on *Original Sin*, on *Virtue*, and on *God's Last End*, etc. though less decisive in their influence on my mind than the one just named, were nevertheless more important in *establishing* my early theological views, than hundreds of other good and valuable books, which I have read.

In general, it may be said that the young preacher, in determining on the proper *extent* of his reading, should restrict himself to books of real merit; that among these, he should give the preference to such as have the most direct bearing on his own sacred work; and that in regard to miscellaneous, or what is termed *light reading*, such as newspapers, and periodicals of every description, he should religiously confine himself within such limits as are consistent with other paramount claims on his time. In regard to works of fiction, I have so often expressed my views,\* that there can be no necessity for repeating them here. But the danger of a conscientious minister, who is fond of books, lies much more in another direction, namely, in suffering himself to be overwhelmed by that flood of miscellany which issues from the modern press, till he is carried away by the current, and loses the control of his time and his mind.

This introduces another topic,—the proper *rate* of reading, as to rapidity.

The *plodding* reader makes no discrimination here;—but,

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\* See page 191 of this volume.



whatever book he happens to have in hand, feels that he has done nothing, if he has not patiently conned it over, page by page, to the end. Now, what is proper on this point, depends on the subject of the book, on its style, on the acquisitions of the reader,—his present object in reading, &c. In the early part of my ministry, the two prominent treatises advocating infant baptism, maintained opposite theories on some important points. It was necessary to read both; but one was so obscure in style, as to require pains and patience to ascertain the meaning. The other was so perspicuous, that the meaning could not be mistaken, and no attention was requisite, which was inconsistent with despatch in reading.

There are cases in which a man may bestow one hour on an octavo volume, to which he could not properly devote three days;—the one hour of time is fully worth all the profit to be derived from the book. The subject of it may be unimportant,—or it may be already familiar to the reader,—or he may know that the author is incompetent to discuss it skilfully, or at least in a manner that will be useful to him. To determine then, how much time I should devote to any book, I must judge not merely by its general reputation, but also by the prospect of its utility to myself. If I am confident that I already understand the subject discussed, as well as the writer, his discussion of it will be of little use to me, whatever it may be to others. But if it is an elementary work, written by a great author, on a great subject;—if it is such a book that at any rate, other men will constantly refer to it, as of standard authority; if especially, it is composed on a plan of consecutive argument, so that each part sustains an essential relation to the whole, it is mere trifling to *turn over its leaves*, as a substitute for *patient reading*.

But the *superficial reader*, (as you must be aware, if you have carefully observed different sorts of men,) is as far from discrimination as the plodder. He can despatch such a work as Butler's Analogy, or Edwards on the will, with very little more attention than he would give to a second-rate volume of biography or travels. He looks at a book long enough to know its

author, its subject, its size ; and then, like certain fanatics, who profess to know the state of a man's heart by looking in his face, he is prepared to give the character of that book. But the infelicity is, that, in pronouncing judgment, on a hasty glance at the work, he is liable to blunder grossly, as to its merits, and the real sentiments of its author. And if this gift of blundering happens to be associated with the gift of confidence, so that what Paul said, in a certain case, "We *know* that we have knowledge,"—he can say in *all* cases with reference to himself,—then his reading amounts to very little, as to its practical advantage. He may *look at* or *look over* hundreds of volumes, not one of which does he ever patiently *read*. Ask his opinion concerning any of these, and you have it without hesitation ; but the only conclusion you can form notwithstanding, is, it *may be so*, and *it may not*. Would you know exactly how it is, you must depend on a thorough examination by yourself, or by some one on whom you can rely.

This sort of superficial reader, however, is often safe in his random statements, from the fact that they respect authors, which lie out of the range of common reading. In some alcove of a public library, he finds an ancient book perhaps, of which there are not five copies in all the libraries of the country. He *looks it over*, instead of reading it, and then quotes it as authority for important facts or opinions,—presuming that however incorrect his representations may be, they will almost certainly escape detection. Doctor Priestly is a notable example of the liberties taken by this heedless and inaccurate class of men, who speak confidently concerning the writings of others, to which they have given only a superficial attention. In compiling his "*History of Early Opinions*,"—though he exhibits great ostentation of learning, and though the object of his work required him, in good faith, to go directly and patiently up to original sources of investigation, it is apparent from his own acknowledgment, that he professedly aimed at nothing more than to "*look carefully through*" the chief works of the early Christian writers ; while he excused himself for so much reliance on "mod-

ern writers,"—because his task must otherwise have cost too much time. It were well if all the dealers in ancient lore, who imitate the unscholar-like haste and carelessness of Priestly, were ingenuous enough to confess the fact.\*

If I were making out a full classification of bookish men, I might remind you of the *sanguine reader*, though he is commonly much akin to the *superficial*. He is never in doubt concerning any writer, ancient or modern; but can give you an opinion off-hand, *currente lingua*. He is most conspicuous, however, for his opinions of *new* books, which he dashes away at once, as worthless, or eulogises as surpassing all others in value.

It only remains to give a few suggestions respecting what I will call the *judicious* reader. His habit is to combine mature reflection with reading, because the end at which he aims, is growth in practical wisdom. The literary epicure may read always, and read every thing, without making solid advances in useful knowledge. Food is not nourishment, without digestion. The gormandizer may fill his stomach, from morning to night, with all the varieties of the table, and yet be but the skeleton of a man. *Thinking* is essential to intellectual growth. Without it, you may accumulate a fund of other men's knowledge, but it will never become *your own*; of course, it will never be classed for use, nor incorporated into that system of practical wisdom, which gives all its value to knowledge. You may

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\* *Note added in 1833.*—Among the men of kindred spirit, in our own country, (though not a native of it,) is one, who was a disciple of Priestly, and with much less of magnanimity than he, has been more cordially devoted to the cause of infidelity. Regarded as a literary paragon by some, who have given unlimited credit to his high pretensions, he has been said to feel no scruples, even in *fabricating historical facts, to answer a purpose*; but taking care to be well covered by the veil of *antiquity*, which he knows but few men have the means of tearing away; while he knows also that these men have too much sober employment and self-respect to notice the errors of a wrong-headed old man, long since too knowing to learn.

recollect that the author of the *Task* draws out this distinction with his own peculiar felicity of manner.

———Knowledge dwells

In heads replete with thoughts of other men ;  
 Wisdom, in minds attentive to their own.  
 Knowledge, a rude unprofitable mass,  
 The mere materials with which wisdom builds,  
 Till smoothed, and squared, and fitted to its place,—  
 Does but encumber what it seems to enrich.  
 Knowledge is proud, that he has learned so much,  
 Wisdom is humble, that he knows no more.

As a farther illustration of these views, I adduce a fact, well known doubtless to some of you, that a late distinguished head of one of our first colleges,\* often mentioned the defect of *his eyes*, as attended with this special advantage, that it compelled him to *think* much. And a gentleman with whom I am intimately acquainted, who has been considered as standing at the head of his profession as a lawyer, ascribes it to the *weakness of his sight*, that he acquired the habit of *classifying* his knowledge, so that he could command it for use, at a moment's warning ; and so that, in ordinary cases, an argument in court cost him no labor of *preparation*. On the other hand, through want of *thinking*, a man, though an incessant *reader*, may attain just about the same post of dignity, and fill as much space in the scale of being, as the *worm* that is encased in the cover of a folio. Some age or two hence, it may, perchance be known that he *did exist*.

Two or three brief suggestions, connected with the preceding remarks, deserve some attention. One is, that I have found the advantage to be derived from reading a book much increased, by making that book the subject of *conversation* with a friend or a small circle of friends. Such an intercommunication may greatly promote knowledge at a small expense of time.

Thought, too, delivered, is the more posses'd,  
 Teaching, we learn, and giving, we receive.

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\* Dr. Dwight.

I presume that among fellow students some such review of their reading, if reduced to system, might be turned to good account.

Another suggestion is, that in reading, the *pen* should always be at hand. I do not mean that it should be used to transcribe sentences or paragraphs, for this will rarely be done by a wise man. But a classification of chief *subjects* may easily be made by the pen, with an alphabetical arrangement, and reference to author and page, so that in a few years, a man shall have an invaluable index of his reading, at least so far as respects books in his own library.\*

But the most important use of the pen in connexion with reading, is to record the thoughts of the reader's own mind. Every one must know from experience that there are cases, in which the perusal of an interesting book, increases, fourfold, his own *inventive power*. The single thought or trains of thought, that are struck out in such moments of propitious excitement, ought to be permanently fastened at once by the pen, for future use, not intrusted to Sibylline leaves, "Ne turbata volent rapidis ludidibria ventis."

My final suggestion is, that the profit to be derived from reading, depends much on the habit of *reviewing*. Thoughts must have opportunity to make a lodgement in the mind, or they will not remain there, and will add nothing to our stock of intellectual furniture. In a busy, active mind, one thing pushes out another, and nothing is permanently impressed, without some pains to recall and deepen a first impression. Hence, on an average, about one fourth part of the time employed on books, should be devoted to *reviewing*. By the adoption of a proper system, with the aid of marginal marks etc. any book that is rich in matter, and written on a method, may be reviewed in a fiftieth part of the time requisite for its

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\* This point I have touched upon, under the *matter* of Sermons; —see Lecture 18, page 216.

original perusal ; and the tenth review will probably be more useful than the first. Of course, I would say, if it is not worth reviewing at all, it was not worth reading at all.

*I am, Gentlemen, affectionately*

*Yours, &c.—*

## LETTER II.

### BOOKS AND READING.

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SENIOR CLASS IN THE THEOL. SEM.  
ANDOVER.

GENTLEMEN,

In fulfilling the promise which I made, to mention a list of books deserving of your attention, in the present stage of your preparation for the ministry, it is proper to say that the object of this letter is a much more restricted one, than that of the preceding. My remarks on reading generally, had respect to books of the useful class, on all sorts of subjects, especially on theology and religion. Even as to such books however, there is an important distinction between *reading* and *study*. In the latter exercise, strictly understood we use certain books, as mere manuals for reference which we never think of *reading*;—while on others we bestow an attention, (as in the sciences we do on Euclid's Elements, or Enfield's Philosophy,) which implies much more than merely that we have *read* them. My present design does not require me to recommend, nor to mention at all, the standard works on Sacred Literature, or Systematic Theology, or Church History;—or to notice any of the books which come in your way of course, as text books or classics in your

regular studies ; but I shall keep within the boundaries of a single department, and advert only to those works which appertain, more or less distinctly to *Sacred Rhetoric* and *Preaching*. In this department too, I shall not attempt to enumerate all the valuable authors which you may find leisure to consult hereafter, but shall chiefly endeavor to name such as are worthy of all the attention which you can bestow on them in the Senior year, at the Seminary, recollecting that your time will be much engrossed with the duties of the Lecture Room, and the labor of actual composition.

It is to be presumed that you have already become familiar with many of the books I shall designate ; but as I know not to what extent this may be the case with different individuals, each one must be left to use the list, according to his own leisure and discretion. Whenever you are prepared to *purchase* books for your own permanent use, that will be quite another concern. In that case you will resort to *bibliothecas* and *copious catalogues* of writers in various departments, or with more safety still, to the advice of those who have experience in such matters. A pretty extensive list, made out for this purpose, you may find in William's Christian Preacher ; and a much more limited one, designed to aid our own students, in regard to their early purchases, is inserted at the close of the Preacher's Manual.

While I trust that no one of you will forego his prescribed studies, or his daily, devotional reading, for the sake of reading the books mentioned below, I suppose that more or fewer of them may be read by all ; and doubtless some of them will be preferred by one, and some by another. No exact classification will be aimed at, except to set down in the first place, some authors on the *theory of Rhetoric in general*, including the department of *Taste* ; then, some on *Sacred Rhetoric*, including *Homiletics* and *Preaching* ; and then a list of *Sermons*.

#### RHETORIC IN GENERAL.

ARISTOTLE,—sometimes called the Stagirite, from the place



of his nativity. That his intellectual powers were of the first order, is evident from the fact that he enjoyed the unbounded confidence and respect of such men as Plato, his instructor, and of Alexander the Great, his pupil. Pope calls him, "the mighty Stagirite,"—and the "bold Columbus of the realms of wit."—By a figure, more rich perhaps than just, Cicero calls him, "That river of flowing gold" (*illud flumen orationis aureum fundens Aristoteles.*) Quintillian, too, pays the highest tribute of respect to his genius. His treatise on *Rhetoric* and *Poetry* has been esteemed the most perfect of any thing from his pen, that has reached modern times. His works, however, were evidently intended to be chiefly intellectual and elementary; and this perhaps accounts for the great obscurity which often attends his style.

**ISOCRATES.** In the life of this Greek rhetorician, prefixed to the edition of his works, which I have used, it is stated that, living at a period when philosophy and eloquence flourished in Greece, he acquired both wealth and fame as an instructor. The first men in the country were his associates, and their sons became his pupils. In style, he was much more copious and sweet than Aristotle, and more perspicuous,—but so fond of elaborate ornament, especially of "point and antithesis," that the best judges have never regarded him as a good model. This is particularly true of the most finished among his orations, "the Panegyric"—on which he is said to have bestowed the labor of ten years. I cannot think that more than a very moderate share of time, can properly be devoted to either of the foregoing, by a Christian student.

**LONGINUS.** This is the only remaining one of the Greek rhetoricians, that I have time to name, and he was the last of that number, having lived in the third century after Christ. His treatise on "the Sublime,"—(though Dr. Pearce has collected the titles of twenty-five works that were ascribed to him,) is the only product of his genius which has been preserved; and this indeed is in a state so mutilated, that it is rather a fragment than an entire work. It is sufficient however, to show

us why its author enjoyed in Athens so exalted a reputation for judgment and taste, and how his distinguished erudition occasioned him to be called, “the living library.”

Among the Latin masters of rhetoric and oratory, you will expect me of course to name, first of all,—

**CICERO.** And I need do little more than name him, because you have read his *Select Orations*, and I presume his *De Oratore*, in the schools;—and as to his rhetorical works generally, you already know *my* opinion of their value, and what is more, you know that there is but *one* opinion on that point among literary men.

**QUINTILLIAN.** Of his *Institutes* it is only necessary to say, that this is the great thesaurus of modern works on rhetoric and criticism. It is to be hoped that some Christian scholar will, before long, prepare a judicious selection from this standard, classical work, for the use of Colleges, and of all who wish for access to such a book.

**DIONYSIUS HALICARNASSUS.** This rhetorician lived a little before the Christian era. He possessed respectable powers of discrimination, and has been classed by Quintillian and other writers, among the distinguished Latin critics. A student of oratory, however, will derive less advantage from reading him, than from either Cicero or Quintillian.

**HORACE.** I name him only for the sake of saying that in his *Art of Poetry*, a work, as you know, of only a few hundred lines, there is more sound sense, and sagacious criticism, than ever were embodied within the same compass, in any language.

**VOSIUS.** His *Instit. Orator.* is well worthy of examination, excepting the parts on technical rhetoric. Blair speaks of him rather cavalierly; but he was greatly the superier of Blair in learning, especially in regard to the philosophy of language.

**WARD.** His *Lectures on Oratory* were designed to exhibit a systematic view of the subject. Notwithstanding the air of formality which prevails in them, and the somewhat servile following of ancient systems, they hold a respectable rank among English works of this class.

LAWSON'S *Lectures*. These possess much the same character with the foregoing, except that they have less compass and weight of matter than those of Ward.

BLAIR. His *Lectures*, on their first publication, had a degree of popularity to which they were hardly entitled, on the score of originality and discrimination. But they are a judicious compilation of the best precepts on Rhetoric. In my opinion, under the vacillations of public taste in our country, they are now regarded with less respect than they deserve; although in acuteness of philosophical research, they are far inferior to the standard work of Campbell on the subject of rhetoric.

KAMES. I make the same remark as on Blair, respecting the earlier and later reputation of this author among the scholars of our country. I am not aware of any good reason why his *Elements of Criticism*, a work which certainly abounds with many rich remarks, should be so little read as it is at the present time.

OGILVIE. His work on *Original Composition*, though not designed to exhibit a system of rhetorical precepts, is a philosophical treatise on style, elaborate indeed, and somewhat obscure, but comprising many thoughts of great value.

I will next mention a few books in the GENERAL DEPARTMENT OF TASTE.

BURKE. His treatise on the *Sublime and Beautiful*, like every thing else emanating from the same profound genius, is well worthy of being read.

ALISON on *Taste*. A charming book; the best on the subject, in any language; though there is a great failure of the author, in not making the *application* of his theory to the most valuable ends.

ADDISON. You are well aware of the views which I entertain concerning his general character as a writer. In respect to the purposes which I have now in my eye, you can hardly find any thing more worthy of being read, for the cultivation of your own taste, than his papers in the *Spectator*, on Imagination, and his criticisms on the genius of Milton.

BEATTIE. Besides that part of his works which is professedly on the theory of Rhetoric, you will find in his volumes, many discussions of correlate subjects, which will very amply compensate a thorough perusal. Over and above that richness of thought, which you would naturally expect in an author of distinguished genius, there is a vivacity, precision, and general felicity in his writings, which attaches great merit to them, if read merely as a *model of style*.

DUGALD STUART. Those parts of his philosophical writings which respect *Memory*, *Imagination*, and *Taste*, are distinguished by those qualities, which would be expected from his powerful mind, and may render important aid to the student of rhetoric.

BROWN. The same remark is applicable to those lectures of this eminent professor, which respect the *Philosophy of the Emotions*.

HARRIS. Among literary men he is chiefly known as the author of *Hermes*, a work of much philological acuteness. His *Philosophical Arrangements*, though not directly on Grammar or Rhetoric, contains many valuable thoughts on the philosophy of style.

GLASSII *Philologia Sacra*, a work on Sacred grammar and rhetoric, exhibits the result of great industry in the writer. It is especially valuable for its classification and elucidation of the *Figures*, contained in the sacred writings.

WARTON. In his strictures on the genius and writings of Pope he has shown himself to possess respectable powers in the department of criticism.

FENELON. I mention him in this connexion, only to recommend to you his *Letter to the French Academy*. Whatever he has written, exhibits evidence that eminent piety may be associated with an ethereal taste.

MELMOTH. In his *Fitzosborn's Letters*, and *Dialogue concerning Oratory*, you will find, besides many judicious remarks on the art of composition, many very respectable specimens of fine writing.

GREGORY. His *Letters on Literature, Taste, and Composition*, addressed to his son, show him to have been a man of good sense, and of very extensive acquaintance with the best authors. His work is designed to comprise a brief, systematic view of the subjects which he professes to discuss.

Instead of increasing this list, as might easily be done, I shall proceed to name a few books on SACRED RHETORIC.

BASIL, CHRYSOSTOM, AUGUSTINE. The first elegant, the second often very eloquent, the third pious, sometimes fanciful, often eloquent. I name these only among the ancient christian preachers, as I think them most valuable for the purpose I have in view. Chrysostom, in his *Treatise on the Priesthood*, and Augustine in his *De Doctrina Christiana*, have many useful precepts on the sacred work.\*

ERASMUS *De Ratione Concionandi* deserves to be read as the work of a scholar and a man of good sense. Though he had no claims to the magnanimity that distinguished some of his great cotemporaries, especially the German Reformer, all his writings that I have read, exhibit genius and learning. He had very just views concerning the preacher's work.

ABBE MAURY. His treatise on *Pulpit Eloquence*, since it was translated into English, has been rewritten by the author in French, and much enlarged. I have been informed by educated Frenchmen, that in his day, he held a first rank among the preachers of his country, for genius and eloquence. His book certainly embodies many very excellent remarks, not only on oratory in general, but especially on *Preachers* and *Preaching* in different periods and countries.

FENELON'S *Dialogues*. Dr. Doddridge, speaking of this lit-

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\* The necessity of enlarging on the character of these ancient preachers, is superseded by the publication of my *Lectures on Homiletics* in which they are often mentioned, especially in Lect. III, On the *History of the Pulpit*. For the same reason, in preparing this letter for the press, I omit all remarks on *Poetry*, and the *Poets*, as I have no room for enlargement here, on what is said in the Lectures, though very briefly, at page 188.

the work of the Archbishop of Cambray, calls it, "his *incomparable dialogues on eloquence*, which, (he says) may God put it into the hearts of our preachers often and attentively to read." And Dr. Williams, speaking of this work, says, it is "deservedly mentioned, by many writers of eminence, with a sort of respect bordering on veneration." It is much to be regretted that a man, who was himself a pattern of apostolic eloquence in the pulpit, should have left almost no sermons for publication.

CAMPBELL. His *Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence*, are almost the only work in which a respectable attempt is made, to exhibit something like a systematic arrangement of principles respecting the composition of Sermons. In his *Lectures on the Pastoral Office*, he often dilates with much interest and ability, on the chief topics of the other work. Both of these books, like every thing else from the pen of the same judicious writer, are well worthy of being read.\*

BISHOP WILKINS. His little treatise on *Prayer and Preaching* was esteemed an elementary work in its day. It contains some hints that may be valuable to a young preacher.

BAXTER'S *Reformed Pastor*. This deserves to be read more than once by every candidate for the holy ministry. The fire of sacred eloquence, which continually glowed in the heart of its author, imparted a pungency and unction to his exhortations, which give them direct access to the hearts of others. This book is not designed to be a didactic treatise on Preaching, so much as to arouse preachers to a sense of the awful magnitude of their work;—it ought to be read once a year, by every young minister who would learn to preach well.

CLAUDE. His *Essay on the Composition of a Sermon*, though it contemplates an arrangement too artificial to be followed by a preacher of good taste, and good inventive powers, suggests many hints from which he may derive advantage.

DR. GREGORY, *On the Composition and Delivery of a Ser-*

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\* His *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, I have omitted in the foregoing list, as it is a classic in the Seminary.

*mon.* Though few of his thoughts are original, he has given an outline of precepts on Preaching, which is worthy of himself as a man of good sense, and extensive acquaintance with books and men.

SMITH'S *Lectures*. The author was a serious, devout man, evangelical in sentiment, and doubtless a faithful minister of Christ. He has touched upon the most important topics relative to the duties of the sacred office; but in his mode of treating subjects, he is rather diffuse and declamatory than intellectual and instructive.

FORDYCE, in his *Art of preaching*, has discussed many of the subjects appertaining to Sacred Rhetoric, in a style rather flowing and popular than strong or discriminating. Though he belongs to the class of desultory writers, he is worth reading.

SWIFT'S *Letter to a Young Clergyman*, on the office of a christian preacher, and also his *Letter to the Earl of Oxford*, on the English language, contain some good thoughts expressed in his characteristic manner. Of his works generally, if I were to express an opinion here, it would be, that they exhibit a pure and simple English *style*, while the *thought* is often offensive by a gross vulgarity, as unpardonable as it is unaccountable in a man who sustained the sacred office.

ROLLIN'S *Belles lettres*. So far as this work respects the department of *taste* generally, and particularly that of *Sacred Rhetoric*, it is well worthy of being read.

EDWARDS' *Preacher and Hearer*. This work is now very little known; but it was written by a man of extensive reading, and of very just views respecting the christian ministry.

MASSILLON'S *Charges*. Though these are adapted especially to the Catholic ministry, they contain thoughts which are important to the christian preacher of every communion, and in all periods of the church.

## SERMONS.

**LATIN AND GREEK FATHERS.** You are already aware that there are in my view imperative reasons why every young minister should read, to a greater or less extent, the *Homilies* of these Fathers. I deem it unnecessary to enlarge in respect to the three that I have already mentioned in this letter; and will barely add, that Gregory Nazianzen has always been reckoned among the first preachers of the ancient church.

**ENGLISH FATHERS.** The work with this title, in the Library of the Theological Seminary, consisting of biographical notices of the Fathers, and selections from their writings, you will find well worthy of your attention, though but a part of these volumes is devoted to sermons.

In the enumeration which follows, it is not my design to mention all the preachers of the British nation, nor even all who were distinguished in their day; as no theological student can afford to read all the English Sermons that have been published; much less can he afford to do this in his Senior year.

**HOWE.** Doddridge says "He is on the whole, one of the most valuable writers in our language, or I believe in the world. His best pieces are, *The Blessedness of the Righteous, Delighting in God, Enmity and Reconciliation, Redeemer's Tears and Dominion, Some Funeral Sermons,* and part of his *Living Temple* are most excellent."

**FLAVEL.** A holy unction pervades his discourses, so that whatever they want in elegance of diction, is more than compensated by the heavenly spirit which they exhibit.

**BARROW.** None of his cotemporaries were superior to him in point of exuberant genius and learning. His sermons have often been studied, for their richness of matter and fertility of rhetorical illustration.

**BATES and JEREMY TAYLOR.** These were among the first preachers of their age; they were decidedly evangelical in sentiment, and their style was distinguished by the charms of imagination.



**TILLOTSON.** In point of genius he probably was not equal to some of his cotemporaries in the ministry, especially **BARROW**, **OWEN**, and **BAXTER**; but his finished education and the early efforts to which he was called, as a court preacher, gave to his discourses the intellectual character for which they are distinguished. Some of his sermons against Atheism, and against Romanism, which were called for by the errors of the age, are distinguished by a severity of argument, almost without a parallel in the history of the pulpit. In his general strain of preaching, he was didactic, making his chief sources of argument, the Bible and common sense. His divisions are not multiplied to so great an extreme, as had been customary before his time; but they are often cumbersome and wanting in perspicuity. On the whole, his style is not distinguished for strength nor harmony. His figures are of the cool and protracted kind, such as comparison, instead of metaphor and personification; and he cannot be called eloquent in the higher sense of that word. His conclusions are wanting in fervor and pungency, and none of his sermons are such as could properly be called *revival* sermons.

**SOUTH.** His temper was haughty, harsh, jealous, vindictive; rendered more unamiable, doubtless, by the spirit of the times. His controversial discourses, are often marked by a bitter censoriousness. His piety seems rather to have the *professional* cast, than the vital warmth of Flavel and Howe. His sermons are rather ethical than doctrinal or evangelical; his divisions are both textual and topical,—but often multiplied and subdivided so as to make confusion. His reasoning is rather rhetorical than logical, but his conclusions fail entirely as to pungency of appeal to the conscience. His style has much originality, and strength, and vivacity of illustration. In figures, as well as single words, he often has the coarseness as well as the vigour of Shakspeare. In his sarcasm and levity of expression, was verified the proverbial remark, “The preacher that makes others laugh, will seldom make himself respected.”

**LEIGHTON.** He was a man of elevated piety, and sound

learning ; and shone as a preacher of the Gospel, among the distinguished lights of the seventeenth century.

BRITISH PREACHERS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

**WATTS.** In style he was rather poetical, easy, flowing, and fervent. A spirit of deep piety, and of religious solemnity runs through all his sermons, which are characterized also by good sense and a lucid arrangement.

**HORNE.** There is a charming simplicity of sentiment and style in the sermons of this prelate, which renders his sermons interesting to intelligent readers.

**DODDRIDGE.** The characteristics ascribed to the foregoing preacher belong to Doddridge, and he has besides evangelical discrimination.

**JOHN NEWTON.** He was distinguished by a native discrimination of taste, which in some measure atoned for the defects of his education. His style, besides simplicity, possesses vivacity and warmth, which render it very safe to be read as a model.

**WHITEFIELD.** The sermons of his that are published from short hand notes, fall immeasurably short of his great fame as a pulpit orator. In sentiment they are evangelical, and in language very simple, but they contain no powerful movement of thought.

**PALEY.** It has always been difficult for me to explain why a preacher of his profound understanding, should have written sermons of so ordinary a character. They correspond but very poorly with the rich and original style of thinking in which he executed his other works.

**BLAIR.** The style of his sermons has many attractions ; and though deformed by occasional inaccuracies, not to have been looked for in a professed critic, it is on the whole, perspicuous, and elegant. Its great fault is want of evangelical fervor.

**ERSKINE.** One of the patriarchs of the Scotch church. His sermons are instructive and evangelical to a high degree.

**McLAURIN.** His sermons are excellent.

GISBORNE, } All distinguished for evangelical sentiment,  
 JAY, } lucid arrangement of matter, and a style  
 BRADLEY, } which preserves a happy medium between  
 VENN, } the dry and phlegmatic, on the one hand, and  
 the declamatory on the other.

CHALMERS. He is distinguished for weight of thought, general correctness of doctrinal views, and a strong current of emotion, which have given him a rank among the most popular preachers of the age. His style, however, has many peculiarities, which render it improper to be imitated by young preachers.

ROBERT HALL. He has justly been reckoned among the greatest men of his day. In his common discourses to his congregation, though unwritten, he is said to have been simple, earnest, and often eloquent to a high degree. The few occasional sermons which he wrote out, for publication, though they exhibit an elevated and occasionally, sublime movement of thought, are too stately and elaborate in point of composition, to be profitable to any other than very intelligent hearers.

FULLER. I have been accustomed to regard him as the greatest British theologian of the last century. His strength lay rather in doctrinal and practical discussion than in powerful impression as a preacher.

Instead of going farther in particular description, I shall only add a few more British preachers, some of whom are excellent, and all worthy to be read, though possessing various degrees and kinds of merit: viz. ROBERT WALKER, BURDER, COOPER, CECIL, ROBINSON, ALISON. The last of these is little more than an elegant essayist; the last but one, in his better days, was a fine model of popular address to unlearned hearers.

#### FRENCH PREACHERS.

Of these, I shall barely name a few of the most distinguished; such as MASSILLON, SAURIN, FENELON, BOURDALOUE, BOSSUET, FLECHIER. The three first of these were more decided and distinct in their exhibition of christian truth, than any other of

the French preachers; and in these respects, Saurin stands higher than the other two. While he is scarcely inferior to any of the rest in point of eloquence, he is superior to them all in doctrinal instruction. While the mode of preaching adopted by Fenelon, was very favorable, (in a man of his talent and great industry,) to strong impression in the pulpit, it has debarred the world from the privilege of reading his discourses, very few of which were committed to paper.

#### AMERICAN PREACHERS.

These I must mention very briefly. My object is not to name all those who have preached with reputation and usefulness, and whose printed discourses have been esteemed as very valuable, but those whose sermons may be especially useful to students in theology and young ministers.

**PRESIDENT EDWARDS.** While there was nothing specially attractive in his manner, and his style had considerable faults, he was scarcely less eminent on the whole as a preacher, than he was as a metaphysician. The chief characteristics of his sermons, were weight of matter, strength and clearness of logical arrangement, and powerful appeals to conscience, by the exhibition of divine truth. His intellectual habits were those of close and abstruse argument; but his exhibitions from the pulpit were evangelical and biblical, not philosophical, nor philological. Scarcely a verbal criticism is to be found in all his discourses, though he was abundantly competent to the elaborate investigations of criticism. His habit was to carry his hearers with implicit deference to the Bible, and teach them to ask, what has God said. He was a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. The divisions of his discourses, though often excessively multiplied, in conformity with the taste of the Puritan Fathers, are in general strictly logical. His aim was to reach the conscience, through the understanding, and his power over the hearts of his hearers, arose from his deep knowledge of himself as a man and a sinner, and

preeminently from his deep views in experimental religion, and his deep christian feeling.

His eloquence was not that of Massillon nor of Whitefield ; it was the power of thought presented with lucid arrangement, with simplicity and fervor to his hearers. Since the day of Pentecost, no sermons have ever been attended with a solemnity of impression on an assembly more deep, and at times overwhelming, than were those of Edwards.

DAVIES. With powers for discrimination and profound research much inferior to those of Edwards, he had a much more popular address in the pulpit. His style, though sometimes diffuse, has an easy, flowing, pungent eloquence, which certainly wins its way to the hearts of hearers. The tyros of the ministry, who have imagined that skill and power in preaching are a recent discovery, resulting from improvements in intellectual Philosophy, might derive some lessons of humility from studying the sermons and character of Davies and Edwards.

BELLAMY. He was the Boanerges of the American pulpit ; evangelical, lucid, strong, pungent, instructive. He and the elder Edwards, cotemporaries and intimate friends, were owned of God as eminent instruments in promoting the salvation of sinners. They were fellow-laborers, too, in contending earnestly and successfully for the faith, against the encroachments of error ; and in establishing the New England churches in the purity, unity, and evangelical order which they have so happily enjoyed.

Of the few remaining authors of sermons, which I have room to mention, (having already much exceeded the intended limits of this letter,) the great advantage which you will derive from reading some of them, consists in their clear and instructive discussion of christian doctrines ; such are HOPKINS, SMALLEY, EMMONS, WITHERSPOON, GRIFFIN, (especially his Park-street Lectures). Others you may read with profit, with a view either to argumentative discussion, or to various other general charac-

teristics of pulpit discourses. Such are TAPPAN, DWIGHT, LATHROP, KOLLOCK, PERKINS, KEITH.\*

*I am, Gentlemen, very affectionately*

*Yours, &c.*

*Charleston, S. C. Dec. 1821.*

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\* To these, I might now add [1833] a considerable number of Sermons of more recent publication, and of great value; but as brevity is indispensable, I will name only those of DR. PAYSON.

For the sake of brevity, too, the list of books which was mentioned in the close of this Letter, belonging to the department of *Spiritual Classics*, is omitted here, as I perceive that the same sort of books are referred to in the Letter which follows this.

## LETTER III.

### RHETORICAL STUDIES IN SENIOR YEAR.

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE SENIOR CLASS IN THE THEOL. SEM.  
ANDOVER.

GENTLEMEN,

It is my duty to submit without repining to the painful allotment of Providence, which cuts me off, for the present, from the circle of friends, and the objects dearest to my heart, and sends me away to sojourn among strangers. For myself, I would derive consolation from the lessons of experience, in which I have been taught that sacrifices of personal feeling which cost the severest struggles, are often most salutary in their influence. So far as I may be enabled to use my pen, I shall hope to employ it in rendering some aid to the studies of those who are in a course of preparation, especially in the last stage of preparation, for the holy ministry.

You are aware, gentlemen, that you are approaching the threshold of your great work as preachers of the gospel. During the present year, an important part of your business is, to learn the best manner of imparting religious instruction to others. All the acquisitions you have made, in your academical and theological course hitherto, you are now to bring into use, in the *practical business of public teaching*. Just so far as you fail in this, your acquisitions, however respectable, will really

be useless to your fellow men. Very little will they know or care about the stores of intellectual furniture which you have laid up by study, except as they see you able to bring forth these treasures, in writing and speaking.

On your regular studies in the Rhetorical department for the winter term, I shall make but few remarks, because respecting these, I am still sanguine in the hope that you will have daily directions from a Professor in whose ability, fidelity, and skill to guide your studies, I have entire confidence. Indeed any suggestions deserving of your regard, which I may give you, as to the business of the Senior year, will be only so much clear addition to the very adequate instructions, which you will receive in your regular, classical exercises.

That you may make the most of this precious year, I will offer some advice, which may assist you to employ, in the most profitable manner, the time not daily occupied in prescribed exercises.

In the *first* place, a greater portion of the time than heretofore, must be *at your own disposal*. An exercise of the Senior year, which requires more time, and more severe study, than any other, is writing sermons. This combines theory with practice; and taken in connexion with criticism of sermons, and Chapel preaching, the system has been considered by good judges as better adapted to its ends, in our Seminary, than any other arrangement which could have been adopted. Besides, no man is ready to enter on his work as a public preacher, till he has a few sermons; nor to enter on it with advantage till those few sermons are as good as he can make. On the character of these, his rank as a preacher, and his destination too, may depend, perhaps for life. But the preparation of these first sermons, is a serious labor,—demanding *time* and *patient study*. Of course prescribed, classical exercises ought not to engross the attention of Senior students to the same *extent* as is proper in the two preceding years. The moment a man comes to the work of expounding the oracles of God, as a guide to souls, there is a *magnitude* attached to the undertaking to which



nothing is analogous in the ephemeral character of College compositions. He is entering on his great, solemn, public work, as an ambassador of Christ. In the earlier efforts of sermonizing, he especially needs to have some unbroken time at his own disposal.

It follows, in the *second place*, that to derive the highest advantage from the Senior year, *system* in study is peculiarly necessary. The business of the year is of course *miscellaneous*. The amount of what you can accomplish depends much on the power of transferring your mind from one thing to another. You must be able to drop your pen and read a lesson, or to go from the Lecture room and resume your writing, without a wasteful expenditure of time. But then remember the good old maxim, "One thing at once." A man ardent for study, and drawing near the close of his preparatory course, and finding his past plans of acquisition but half accomplished, may feel that a thousand things are to be done. But let him not neglect his *present* business to bring up his arrears.

In the *third place*, great vigilance is necessary to preserve rigid *habits* of *punctuality*, if you have them, and if not, to establish them now. When so many things are to be done, and often to be done in the same day, one thing will jumble out another, without great care that every thing shall have its place and time. I have known, for example, a conscientious man persuade himself that, while writing a sermon, especially his *first* sermon, he might very properly excuse himself, occasionally, from Chapel prayers, or from a regular Lecture. In this respect, "obsta principiis." It is always unsafe in principle to let one duty crowd out another. Let every man of the class proceed through the year with the fixed resolution never to be absent from any single regular exercise, *unless he is sick*. As to other engagements, such as "the call of a friend," &c. a man of conscience and of business can seldom turn aside for them. It would be no reason, with you or with any one, why an *officer* of the Seminary should forego a Lecture, that the President of a College called on him at that hour. To all the motives en-

forcing the obligations of punctuality on other students, the importance of *good example* in a *Senior Class* is superadded, and ought to be regarded as of serious weight in a *Theological Seminary*.

In the *fourth place*, I add some cautions as to the preparation of your first sermons. Avoid unnecessary *delay* in this case. One third of every class is disposed to look at this thing with an indefinite dread, to examine the catalogue and see how soon it *must* be done, and then postpone even the commencement of the work as long as *possible*. This is unwise:—it is morally wrong. It subjects both the writer of a sermon, and his Instructor, by whom it is to be criticised, to great inconvenience.

I would certainly avoid *hurry*: but on the other hand, I would not be *a month* in writing a skeleton, and another month in executing it. It is desirable that each man should have four or five schemes criticised, before he executes any one. These should all be on important, evangelical subjects, and the judgment of the Instructor may in this way be obtained as to the choice of a subject, for your first effort. In my opinion about half of the sermons written at the Seminary should be on doctrinal subjects;—I mean *doctrino-practical*.

The process in preparing to write a sermon may be such as the following:—study your text as explained by the Bible; search for its *meaning*, according to the best rules of interpretation;—then examine Commentaries;—then draw out a skeleton, with principal and subordinate points, keeping your eye on a main effect to be produced by the sermon as a *whole*, and giving each part its place, that you may avoid disproportion, collision, and repetition. Cicero's oration for Milo, you have often heard me recommend as a fine example of this happy arrangement. Above all, so dispose of your materials as to make, not a tame, but a full and strong *conclusion*. As an intellectual exercise, adapted to sharpen the inventive powers, nothing can be better than *skeleton-writing*. The composition of a chris-

tian sermon, is the highest effort to which the intellectual and moral powers of man can be devoted.

After you have thus employed your own thoughts on a text and subject, you may properly modify and enrich your plan by *reading* on the subject, and adopting the thoughts of others, while the course of thought will yet be your own.

In the *fifth* place, I will advert to some things besides the regular course of studies, so far as the Rhetorical department is concerned, to which every member of the Senior Class should devote, if possible, a portion of his time. Among these I would include some progress in the reading of *ancient classic* writings. How far it would be best, in the advanced stages of theological study, to turn aside, for the reading of Greek historians and orators, must depend on the circumstances of individuals.\* But I could wish to see in our students a maturity of scholarship enabling them to analyse a page of the Iliad, or to compare that poem, by the principles of Christian taste, with the Paradise Lost. Besides a good degree of familiarity with Cicero's rhetorical works, and with parts of Quintillian's Institutes so strongly urged heretofore; it belongs to the proper range of reading, that each student enable himself to compare the principal Fathers, Greek and Latin, among themselves, and with modern preachers; also to compare the principal lights of the pulpit, since the reformation, viz. the Scotch, English, and French preachers of different periods.—I might add, that a wide compass of important reading is presented in English literature, with which a man liberally educated for the ministry can hardly be excused, if he does not make himself in a good degree familiar. In this compass may be reckoned a tolerable acquaintance with English history,—with the universities of Britain, and her best writers of different ages, poets, essayists, orators, and especially preachers.

There is still another class of books that are too much shut out by the pressure of various engagements in our Seminary—I

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\* If the reader will compare the date of this letter with that of the foregoing, he will perhaps excuse an occasional repetition.

mean books that derive their chief value from their *piety*. I do not refer chiefly to books of *devotion*, as such; for these I take it for granted no member of the Seminary neglects. I mean what may be called *spiritual classics*; such as the more experimental works of Jeremy Taylor, Owen, Baxter, Howe, Flavel, John Newton; and the religious biographies, &c. mentioned in the Catalogue at the close of the *Young Preacher's Manual*—second edition. The great purpose of reading these, is to *warm the heart*, and cherish habits of *holy sensibility*. Sooner or later you must learn, that you cannot make a sermon while your *heart* is asleep. Better that it should be awakened to emotion by reading Shakspeare's *Othello*, than to have *no emotion*. But infinitely better still that its emotion be spiritual and evangelical, such as you cannot fail to experience by reading a few pages of the *Reformed Pastor*, or *Saints' Rest*. Whenever I have maintained, for a considerable time, the habit of reading portions from some one of the above books, in connexion with a devotional reading of the Scriptures, I have always found substantial benefit to the state of my heart. For point, pungency, and holy eloquence, Baxter has been my favorite—especially his *Saints' Rest*.

But I must close this letter, by wishing you, gentlemen, the presence of God, in the interesting pursuits of the winter, and by assuring you that I am with sincerest affection,—

*Yours, &c.—*

*Charleston, S. C. Dec. 17, 1832.*

## LETTER IV.

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TO A PROFESSOR IN A THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

*Theol. Sem. Andover, Oct. 1826.*

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

I have not forgotten your request that I would give you a detailed account of the exercises in our *Rhetorical department*; and I shall now comply with that request, so far as I can, consistently with other engagements that have imperative claims on my time. You will indulge me, however, in a few preliminary remarks, on those peculiar characteristics of this department, which must devolve on any one who has charge of it, a heavy amount both of labor and responsibility.

All the attainments that are made in other departments, are to be *exhibited* in this. The public know nothing of our students as to biblical or theological learning, except what appears in their capacity to write or speak. This department is therefore, in an important sense, made responsible for the character and influence of the Seminary. It is besides attended with more intrinsic difficulties than any other branch of instruction. So the Creator has been pleased to arrange his gifts, that there are five men capable of being distinguished in intellectual studies, to one that can become conspicuous in oratory. The systems of academical education in modern ages, have been

generally unfriendly to high attainments in this art, being adapted to cultivate the understanding; but to repress rather than to cherish the *emotions* of the youthful mind. In some of our Colleges the business of taste and of elocution stands on a very reputable footing; in others, it is greatly neglected; and in none of them does it receive a tenth part of that attention which made the orators of ancient days. Considering the state of our academies, and the limited resources which most of our Colleges possess, I am not disposed to find fault that no more is accomplished on this subject. I only state the fact as it is, and the consequences unavoidably resulting from it, that not a few of our students come to us with habits both as to writing and speaking, that are positively bad.

There is another consideration which has an important bearing on this department, namely, that while it requires a system of precepts, it is still to be taught as an *art* rather than as a science. After all the use that can be made of text books, and rules, and authorities, the advancement of the student both in writing and delivery, depends essentially on *practice*. It is this that constitutes the endless labor in this branch of instruction. Classical exercises must be maintained as in the other departments, but to these must be superadded a system of *individual* instruction, such as is not required in any other business of the Seminary. In regard to the more extended of these exercises, such as the private criticism of sermons, the attention to *each pupil* costs more labor than is ordinarily required of any Professor in meeting a class. The amount of labor in instructing a large class, thus collectively and separately, is not easily understood by any one who has not made the experiment. For example; in giving instruction to a Class, we all spend, in the act of teaching, about one hour. When I meet the Senior Class, for a Lecture on Sermonizing, I give instruction to thirty five men, (supposing that to be its number,) in the same time as I should to ten. But taking these men in detail, as I have been accustomed to give *private* instruction in sermonizing, instead of one *hour's* work, I have at least that of *thirty five*

*days* ; because to criticise a sermon with my eyes, and to review the writer's corrections of it, cannot be done in less than a day. And in the best labor-saving process that could be adopted, namely, hearing each man read his own sermon, it must cost about twelve days, the sitting being continued for six hours in a day. On this subject, of private criticism, I do not speak at random, having myself sustained the entire labor of it during eight years of my residence here, with only such incidental aid as could be rendered by my respected colleagues, already pre-occupied with a pressing amount of duties in their own appropriate departments. This labor varies somewhat from year to year, with the size of the classes, each student being expected to present for criticism on an average from four to six sermons, during the Senior year.

I will now give you as summary a view as I can, of the exercises in our rhetorical department, which are divided, as you are already aware, into two principal branches, Composition and Elocution. The chief business in the first year has been the study of Sacred Literature ; in the second, of Christian Theology ; in the third, of Sacred Rhetoric. All the classes however attend on exercises in Elocution, and the Middle Class have devoted one day in a week, for a part of the year, to the writing of skeletons, besides dissertations and text-book exercises on subjects connected with Philology and Taste. The routine of instruction in this department has been conducted in the following manner.

1. *My own written Lectures*, consisting of three distinct courses,—one on *Homiletics* and *Preaching*,—another, on *Style*, and the *principles of Taste*,—and another, on *Elocution*, especially as pertaining to the Pulpit.

2. Public Criticism of a Sermon, on Friday of each week. In this exercise, the reader mentions his pages as he proceeds.—The whole class, but especially the division who are to criticise, take notes, so as to remark with promptness and despatch.—During the reading or criticism of a sermon, no silent conversation, no attitudes or deportment inconsistent with the delicate

proprieties of the place and occasion, are to be indulged.— Criticisms are to be made with fraternal fidelity and frankness ;— but it is understood that asperity and sarcasm in manner are to be avoided. In the course of this exercise, and especially at its close, the free remarks of the Professor are superadded to those of the students ; and the sermon is afterwards presented for his inspection, having been corrected and transcribed by the writer. In preparing a sermon for this exercise the student is not expected to present the skeleton beforehand to the Professor, as is common in respect to sermons designed to be criticised in private.

3. *The writing of skeletons.* It has been customary to require the skeleton of a sermon from each member of the Middle and Senior classes ;—from the former, while they are giving attention to this business, once in a week ;—from the latter, once in two weeks. Experience has taught me to regard this branch of instruction with increasing interest. Whether the exercise is considered as adapted to discipline and expand the intellect, to promote theological discrimination, or a thorough preparation for the pulpit, I cannot but think it well deserving of all the attention it has received. The revision of these skeletons, furnishes the Professor the very best opportunity to instruct his pupils in the principles of sermonizing. From this exercise chiefly has resulted that simplicity and perspicuity of method in sermons, for which, if I mistake not, our pupils have been distinguished. So fully convinced of this, have they generally been, that some of them have been accustomed to write several skeletons each week.

4. *Classical Discussions* on important subjects in the department of Homiletics and Preaching. These are chiefly confined to the winter term, and are conducted in the forensic form, on questions admitting of argument on both sides, such as “ Whether the ministers of New England, in preaching doctrines, are more liable to err on the side of caution or of indiscretion ? ” “ Whether the delivery of written, or unwritten sermons has a tendency to promote in the best manner the great ends of



preaching?" Two members of the class, on each side, are expected to be prepared in writing, and the discussion is closed by spontaneous remarks from other students and from the Professor. When the subject possesses practical importance, this exercise draws forth from individuals a strain of argument that is often animated and sometimes highly eloquent.

5. *Review of Distinguished Preachers.* In preparing a class for this exercise, I have named beforehand a preacher of celebrity, as *Augustine* or *Tillotson*, requesting the whole class to read at least ten of his sermons, by a given time. Two of the class are designated to prepare a written review of this preacher, one exhibiting his excellencies and the other his defects. The design is to bring into view his chief characteristics in respect to doctrine, weight of matter, skill in arrangement, evangelical spirit, peculiarities of style, illustration &c.\*

6. *A course of exercises with Campbell's Philosophy of Rhetoric as a Text Book.* These embrace only the most interesting parts of the work, and occupy a class for ten or twelve Lectures. Of late this book has been introduced into two or three of our Colleges, as a classic for undergraduates. In my opinion the profitable study of it, requires a maturity in the department of taste, which can be attained only by a considerable length of experience, in the actual *practice of writing*, and which, therefore, renders it more appropriate to students in their professional than in their academical course of education. For profound and discriminating views of the subjects which it treats, no work, ancient or modern, can bear a comparison with this work of Campbell.

7. *Exercises in Elocution.* On Monday and Thursday, in each week, the whole Seminary meet in the Chapel, for exercise in public speaking. At each time, six speakers, in the order of the catalogue, exhibit original compositions; except that for some time past, for the sake of variety, the pieces spoken on Monday, have usually been extracts; and

\* One advantage of this exercise is, that it furnishes me a very favorable opportunity to discuss the great principles of preaching, as these have been subjected to the test of experience in different ages. Another advantage is, that it enables the students from their own individual examination, to judge what things are to be avoided or imitated in those who have been accounted the prominent lights of the pulpit.

for a year or two, to save me from too frequent exposure in the winter, the exercise on Monday has been attended only in the Summer Term. Thursday afternoon, through the year, is occupied by the public speaking, that is, it is the understanding of the Faculty that no other exercise shall be assigned to a Class on that afternoon, requiring preparation on their part. These exercises are introduced by prayer, as are all our public exercises; and on Thursday, a Dissertation is read by a member of the Senior Class, from six to ten minutes in length, on some rhetorical subject, more or less directly related to the eloquence of the pulpit; which subject has been previously assigned by the Professor.\*

When the students who exhibit in this exercise, come to it with spirit, and with a preparation seasonably and thoroughly made, both the dissertations and the declamations, are often marked with a maturity of thought, and a strength and vivacity in execution, which create a much deeper interest in my own mind, than I have usually felt in listening to the academical exercises of our College commencements.

I have been thus particular under this head, because you wish me to enter into details respecting the best methods of promoting the interests of elocution among theological students. For the same reason, I will also mention a distinct arrangement, called *Rhetorical Clubs*, in which students voluntarily unite for improvement in reading and declamation. In this exercise, which is attended at my own study in the winter, and in the summer at the Lecture Room, about twelve men are united in one club. For some time, at first, four of these read; and afterwards two read and two speak; time being always allowed after the performance of each individual, for very particular remarks on his habits of elocution in respect to every thing which is

\* No speaker is expected to exceed six minutes in length. Every gentleman is expected so to arrange his concerns, as never to ask leave of absence from town, when it is his turn to speak, except in some case of urgent necessity. If he fails to speak with his own division, he is called at the close of the next division. The speakers remain in the Chapel, (after their fellow students have retired,) for the sake of receiving the free remarks of the Professor on their manner.

For a number of years after I became connected with the Seminary, the students sustained a very serious inconvenience as to compass and power of voice, from the fact that all their public exercises in elocution were unavoidably confined to a small room. Since this difficulty was obviated by the erection of the new Chapel, they are accustomed spontaneously to speak with a strength and distinctness of voice, that is much more favorable than their former habits, to their first efforts as preachers, in large congregations.

deemed faulty, by his fellow students, or by myself. It has been my wish so to arrange these exercises as to bring each member of the Seminary under my own private instruction, as to speaking, at least once in two or three weeks; but the immense amount of labor which this would devolve upon me, has rendered it impossible to execute the plan, except to a partial extent. The success, however, which always has attended these private exercises, affords gratifying proof that they are an indispensable auxiliary in the labor of transforming indifferent speakers into such as are good, or at least respectable. On this subject, it were vain to reason, should we attempt it, against the unbroken testimony of all experience. Those defects of elocution for which the youthful Demosthenes was repeatedly hissed by his auditors, never would have been overcome, by barely speaking in public for a few minutes, two or three times a year. The rhetorical discipline by which speakers were made in ancient days, I have said was ten times, and I might have said, fifty times more thorough than any thing to be found in modern systems of education. When I look at the great men of Rome, and see Cicero, at the head of her senate, and Cesar, at the head of her armies, in the daily habit of private reading and speaking for their own improvement, I should be inclined to presume, even independently of my own observation on the subject, that skill in elocution is not likely to be attained by accident. Cicero said, "No man is an orator, who has not learned to be so." Among our students, there is indeed now and then a man who knows more about these matters than Cicero; and who confidently maintains that it is enough for any one to be so much of an orator as he *happens* to be, and that to aim at any thing more, is the certain way to spoil himself, by artificial habits. But this sort of man, I have observed, when I come to hear him speak, commonly *happens* to be no very perfect orator; yet of the many faults which he *happens* to have, he cannot correct any one, because he lacks both patience and skill to learn what it is, or by what process it is to be corrected. Upon the whole, I have become fully satisfied, as the result of experience, that no man becomes possessed of an interesting and im-

pressive delivery, except as the result of pains and patience in preparatory discipline. That he should speak in *public* is indispensable, to give him the power of looking an assembly in the face, without an unmanly flutter of spirits. But such an exercise can do but little towards correcting his faults. Whatever these may be, he needs the advantage of *private drilling* with his teacher, which shall afford the opportunity of pointing his attention minutely, to habits that are amiss in the management of his voice. By the aid of such a drilling, he may perhaps learn in one half hour what he could never learn without it.

Connected with the elocution of the Seminary, there is one thing more to which I will advert for a moment. Between two and three years ago, a *Rhetorical Society*, was formed by the students, on a broader plan than any thing that had existed here before, under that name. The constitution was framed with much reflection, and has been carried into operation with a zeal and promptitude, which thus far promises important collateral aid in this department. The deficiency of books in the public library adapted to the studies of Sacred Rhetoric, seems likely to be remedied, in some good measure, by the library of this Society, which is already respectable; and which I hope will be increased till it shall obviate a serious inconvenience with which the Rhetorical department has been struggling from the commencement of the Seminary.

Thus far, the influence of this Society, by means of its library and its exercises, promises very considerably to enhance the value of a professional education here. Already it is said to have increased, to a degree that is quite apparent, the power of extempore speaking among the students.

*With much affection and respect, I am,*

*Rev. and dear Sir, Yours, &c.*

















